

# Aide-de-Camp's Library



Rashtrapati Bhavan  
New Delhi

Accn. No. 1407

Call No. IX (6) - 15

\_\_\_\_\_





# A MODERN SINBAD



## Some Press Opinions of A MODERN SINBAD

"There have been all sorts of exciting autobiographies of travellers lately. But they all pale, for variety of incident, before *A Modern Sinbad*."—SIR JOHN SQUIRE (*London Mercury*).

"The most astonishing autobiography I have ever read, for diversity of adventures, candour of writing, and knowledge of life. If this vivid, downright book is a characteristic sample of the author's work, then I do not see how he can be over-looked."—CECIL ROBERTS (*Sphere*).

"What is most impressive is his amazing courage in the face of every kind of difficulty. . . . He can write well, with an easy, vivid, convincing style, and this combination of adventure and suffering, courage and efficiency, have made an enthralling book."—H. E. BATES (*Spectator*).

"One of the most astonishing books that I have read for years, and one of the frankest and most eventful autobiographies ever written."—*Sunday Express*.

"His narrative style has all the blunt power and directness of the great Scottish novelist Smollett. Delicate tastes, in fact, will be shocked at some of the incidents described."—*Liverpool Post*.

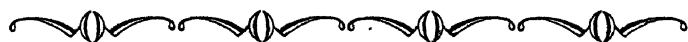
"Gifted with a photographic memory, a Pepysian frankness, and a trenchant style, he can re-create episodes with flashlight clearness."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"He has experienced an astonishing series of adventures, and he describes them graphically and with a simple candour that makes attractive reading. His style is vigorous and unpretentious. He has a strong sense of self-criticism and a fine courage in adversity, and his adventures, even at their tallest, have the genuine smack of authenticity."—*Daily Telegraph*.





"SINBAD" ON HIS ARRIVAL AT BERMUDA AFTER HIS TWELVE-HUNDRED-  
MILE LONE VOYAGE THROUGH A HURRICANE



A  
MODERN SINBAD

*An Autobiography*



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.  
LONDON BOMBAY SYDNEY

First published October 1933  
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & Co. LTD.  
39-41 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.2  
Reprinted : October 1933  
October 1933  
November 1933

---

*Printed in Great Britain by Sherratt & Hughes, at the  
St Ann's Press, Manchester*

FOR DICK  
WHO SLEW  
MY OLD MAN OF THE SEA

NOTE TO THE READER

*Apart from the disguising of a few  
names of ships and people, every inci-  
dent described in this autobiography  
is strictly true.*

# CONTENTS

## PART I

### VOYAGES AND LANDFALLS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	WHEN VERY YOUNG	11
II	SCHOOL	19
III	I ENTER THE CHURCH	25
IV	I GO TO SEA	30
V	FIVE BOB A MONTH	44
VI	A REAL SAILOR	52
VII	SWEET DAYS AND BITTER	61
VIII	A YEAR OR TWO	68
IX	OVER SHE GOES !	77
X	ROVINGS	88
XI	TREASURE-HUNTING	95
XII	CRUSOES	102
XIII	ONE SMALL HUMAN	109
XIV	LOOSE ENDS	118
XV	' WILY HUNKS '	125
XVI	A WRECK AND A RESOLVE	132
XVII	FREE AGAIN	141
XVIII	DEAD MAN'S SHOES	146
XIX	" UNEASY LIES THE HEAD——"	154
XX	" BE SURE YOUR SIN——!"	161
XXI	A NEW DEPARTURE	173

## PART II

### LANDLUBBER AND SCRIBBLER

XXII	LONDONER	185
XXIII	INDUSTRY AND PATIENCE !	192
XXIV	MANAGER !	198
XXV	HARD TIMES	208



# A MODERN SINBAD

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXVI	LAND OF OPPORTUNITY!	215
XXVII	LANDED!	225
XXVIII	REUNION	235
XXIX	STILL SEEKING	244
XXX	THE WEATHER BREAKS	253
XXXI	WITH KNOBS ON IT	260
XXXII	GETTING ON	270
XXXIII	BERMUDA	281
XXXIV	LOOKING AHEAD	288
XXXV	PREPARATION	297
XXXVI	ANDROS	305
XXXVII	LIGHT AHEAD	314

■

PART I  
VOYAGES AND LANDFALLS

■



## CHAPTER I

### WHEN VERY YOUNG

MY first venture into exploration frightened me; so I became a sailor. I was about two years old when my mother forbade me to go near a big manure heap in our tiny garden, while she chatted with a neighbour over the backyard fence. The conversation was all about my new first knickerbocker suit. Beyond the manure heap was a dense forest of dahlias. To escape from the notice forced upon me by my new suit, I scaled the heap, achieved the peak, and tumbled down the other side into the dahlias, where I got very thoroughly lost and scared. I was a very small explorer.

Ours was a tiny house in Albert Street, St Ebbe's, which, as every one knows, is by no means Oxford's best residential parish. My father was a shopman in Market Street; my mother had been a servant in the house of Boffin, whose cake-shop was at Carfax. The Boffins had been very good to their servant, and most of our house furnishings had come from them, or by their help. My new suit, of grand blue velvet, was made by my mother out of a gorgeous dress given to her by a Boffin—a much too splendid garment for anybody in my mother's station in life. Hence it clothed my skinny legs, and, being held up to exhibition, bored me. I knew then that I was nothing to look at. My plunge into exploration was by way of protest.

When the floods came, which they did yearly, and always into our house, I went voyaging. My first voyage was from east to west in a wash-tub over the Black Sea of our coal-cellar. It ended in shipwreck on a reef of coal, and by it I won a terrific cold, a hot smacking, and my first recollected warning that I would come to no good.

All through my early life parents and relatives maintained that my end would be awful. Of all my childhood memories

the most vivid is that my days were full of "Don't!": my retiring hours made wretched by the reiteration that I must ask God to make me a much better boy. The incessant censure bothered me, I could never understand why such a nice world held so many things forbidden to a little boy. I never felt wicked; I put the suggested request to God into my enforced prayers under a standing threat of boxed ears, and hated prayers.

When about four years old I was packed off to the Green Hill Infants' School. Green Hill was off Penson's Gardens, near Paradise Square, but, for all the musical suggestions of those names, it was at that time about the most sordid alley that ever disfigured a beautiful old city. On one side was a row of hoardings, on the other the school and a row of poky little poverty-stricken cottages. The Hill itself dribbled out at the top into Church Street, then one of the least salubrious thoroughfares of St Ebbe's.

We were a mixed lot—boys and girls—and a disgraceful lot, too. Nowadays, whenever I watch children at play I wonder uneasily if it is possible that they, when unwatched, perform the nasty little tricks that we learned on the bottom row of a bank of benches in that school. That any lasting good was achieved I do not believe. Everything about the school was directly opposed to useful influences upon infant minds and bodies; though I know this was no fault of the hard-working woman and girl who strove with us. The mistress was consumptive, and spat continually, inspecting her handkerchief after each effort. There were no toilet facilities except in the open yard. The atmosphere was sordid to the last degree; and one uplifting little song which we infants had to sing began:

"I should like to die," said Willie, "if my papa could die too.  
But he says he is not ready, for he's got so much to do."

Is it any wonder that small boys learned little besides foul monkey tricks! Or that little girls often ran red and weeping to the teacher? I believed for many years afterwards that we must have been uncommon pagans at the Green Hill school;

until I read tales of modern public-school life, written by Old Boys. Kids seem to be pretty much alike, whatever their origin or accent.

We were called Poor and Proud in Albert Street. My tender feet were fettered in hobnailed boots tipped at heel and toe with iron. My clothes were always made from left-off garments of other people. My sister, Lizzie, whom I loved greatly, never had a frock which was newly made for her until she was twelve years old. She had to go every morning, before breakfast, along Speedwell Street to the dairy for a ha'p'orth of skimmed milk; and when I was five the errand was transferred to me. Our breakfast in winter was bread sops, with brown sugar and skimmed milk: in summer it was changed to three slices of bread and lard—stale bread, because new bread was not good for us. On Sundays we all went to the Salvation Army, where Father played a big euphonium. He soon became bandmaster, with authority and a whistle:

Dad liked authority. As bandmaster he was somebody, and as often as possible he brought home to tea some visiting titled notable of the Army. On grand occasions like these there was cake for tea, sometimes angel fingers, for Mother was a good cook if she could get the materials; but luxuries were not for children, unless the guests left some. None were ever left.

I suspect Father liked titles better than he liked children. Lizzie and I often discussed it in childish rage after we were in bed. We had to sleep together, because of lack of room, until Lizzie was fourteen and I was twelve. If somebody had to be put up for a night one of us slept in the lower drawer of the bureau. The guest, if a female, slept with Lizzie, and I in the drawer. If it was a man he slept with me and Lizzie took the drawer. Poor kid! She was much too long to fit into a drawer even then, but that never bothered Father.

We often wondered why our parents had us. Beyond being slapped and occasionally smacked we were not ill-treated; but we saw no good in going without a rare bit of cake in order that strangers might be fed. We were always sent to bed before the evening Army meeting, too, and our pre-bed hours

in the ghastly little parlour were a nightmare of "Stop wriggling!" "Take your feet off the chairspars!" "Don't you dare speak while Colonel So-and-So is talking!" "Go out? No, you can't. Bless my soul, what are children coming to? Did you ever hear the like, Colonel So-and-So?"

The parlour was only opened on Sundays and at Christmas. It was a tiny room, not much bigger than a large packing-case, and in it were crammed six small chairs, which stood flat against the walls, two easy-chairs, a what-not, a flower-pot on a cane stand, a piano and stool, and a round table. One had to edge round that table. Where one sat one stuck, until everybody moved. On the table always lay an album, a big Bible, a shell-covered box from Barbados, and a framed picture of Father in his Army uniform, with his great big euphonium and whistle.

In that little parlour I endured miseries which made childhood a thing of horror instead of happiness. For untold hours I sat there, glued to my hard stool or chair, hands in lap, feet dangling, forbidden to move or speak, while a roomful of my elders talked all the air out of the room. For a child even to look happy on Sunday was unthinkable.

There were a lot of relatives. Aunt Lizzie, my mother's youngest sister, was a most superior person, for she was parlour-maid to Professor Case, whose sons, T. B. and W. S., were to be famous cricketers. Aunt Lizzie usually sat in one of our two easy-chairs. At chapel she rented a pew, and held herself one of the Lord's anointed. She was fond of my sister, but she was certain that I was destined to hang. I don't think she liked me much.

Uncle Joe was a stoker at the gasworks, but rarely came to see us. He sometimes got drunk, so was frowned upon.

Aunt Lydia was stone-deaf, and worked in a little hand laundry. She was splendid. Often she sneaked a penny into my hand, and as soon as I grew strong enough she got a job for me, every Friday after school, from four to eight o'clock, turning the mangle at the laundry. I got tuppence for that, and my tea, very weak tea, after the girls had finished, and bread and margarine. That was much better than lard. Lydia

loved my sister and me equally, and never once told me I was bound to come to a bad end.

Uncle Jack navigated a dustcart. On Saturdays in summer he ran a watercart on the Botley Road, and often let me go with him. Those were great days for me, perched on a heap of sacks behind a tall, smelly horse. When the watercart was needed the sun usually shone brightly; and sometimes I was allowed to work the water levers. Jack drank beer, too, so was only tolerated at home because it was useful to have somebody to take me out of the way occasionally. But he was good to me, and I hope he's resting in a place where they don't need dustcarts.

Uncle Sam was an officer in the Salvation Army—therefore a relative to brag about. Charles worked for the gasworks, and sometimes, for a treat, let me trot along with him when he read gas-meters. Isaac made boots, and did rather better than most of the others, for he succeeded in his business, and later had quite a good shop of his own. I saw little of Isaac, but liked him well. He too treated me as if I were part human.

Aunt Annie was another good sort, who was married to a Bletchington baker and had a baby every year. When I spent a holiday at her home the place was seething with kids. I forget how many she had, but it was a swarm—so many that two other boys, myself, and a girl had to sleep all together in a big straw bed up under the thatched roof. Rats and mice played over the bed, for all the sacks of flour stood in the same attic. But we had plenty of fun. On Saturday nights all the swarm were bathed, two or three at a time, in the great wooden trough in which the dough was made. Uncle Ted made his bread in the old-fashioned way, with boiled potatoes and barm from the brewery, and once he upset the sieve when squashing potatoes into the flour, and spoiled the whole batch with peelings. He was a violent man, and even Aunt Annie ran away with us for an hour. When we crept back to the house all the kids were made to clean the dough from every part of the bakehouse where Ted had hurled it, while he went out and got drunk.



To get to Bletchington in those days one travelled by carrier's cart, and the fare was sixpence for big folks, threepence for children. I was put into my seat at one o'clock and told to sit still. By two o'clock ten people had stuffed themselves into the little covered cart. Everybody had bundles; some had livestock. Every time the carrier brought a parcel to stow he had a drink at the Plough, which was kept by Benham, Sanger's old clown. By four o'clock I was crushed against the back of the driver's seat, and still people crowded in. It was dark inside, and nobody took any notice of one small boy. Tired of waiting for the carrier, passengers kept getting out for beer, and when the carrier did eventually arrive ready to start he was singing. By the time the cart turned into Cornmarket he was ugly drunk, and the cart reeked horribly. All along the Banbury Road he had parcels to deliver—always at a pub, it seemed. Swinging along in the darkness, a lantern hung to the axle, the horse slowed to a walk because the driver slept, but never a pub was passed without a halt. Well trained in obedience, I stuck tight to my corner in cramped agony, until I arrived at the bake-house opposite Bletchington Park gates thoroughly wet and wretched.

Because they were holidays I forgot the discomfort, but I could have chosen much better for myself. Perhaps I was born a rebel. The finest holiday I could have had would have been spent in roaming at will through glorious Oxford, getting acquainted with its delightful gardens, learning about its historic fame. Instead, I must needs be shipped off to some remote village, to inconvenience people who had neither room nor desire for me, to spend my holidays under what was simply another form of the "Don't!" discipline. But then I was a poor, timid, skinny kid whose attempts at self-expression rarely earned anything except a whipping, a boxed ear, a promise of damnation, or all combined.

One vivid memory concerns a holiday which, because Aunt Annie was in the straw, I could not spend at Bletchington. With my father in the Salvation Army band was a young cornet-player who was courting a buxom country girl living

at Henwood, and by some means an invitation was wangled for me to spend some weeks with the girl's parents for a small weekly payment. The tiny hamlet was only a short carrier's cart ride distant, and, since after leaving Old Botley there were no pubs, I reached "Henud" safely.

Chronological sequence is disturbed here, because I was eleven years old at the time of the Henwood adventure, but it rightly belongs to this period of my life and therefore to this chapter. The cottage to which I was sent had only two rooms: a stone-flagged living-room in which everything was done, including cooking at a great wood fire, and a big bedroom over it in which everybody slept. The family consisted of the father and mother, two adult sons, a fat, pimply adolescent youth with decidedly lecherous tendencies, and the buxom girl before mentioned. The father earned twelve shillings a week on a farm; the adult sons worked on another farm for about the same wages, but were saving their wages towards getting married. Every Saturday the father received his wages and a piece of mutton; for the rest there was the garden and a bit of poaching.

My weekly contribution was apparently a godsend. The people made me very welcome, but I was afraid of the pimply youth, with whom I had to sleep. He scared me almost to death, and the next night I was put to sleep with the buxom lassie, who terrified me. I pondered running away, though it was five hot miles to Oxford, and I possessed not one stiver. Thanks to a bread-and-lard diet I was far from sturdy. I hesitated before making my decision, and a diversion came to prevent my flight. The girl was sent to a lonely cottage some miles across the fields, to nurse a dying old peasant who wanted somebody to read the Bible to him; and she took me with her for a treat. It was a smaller cottage than the one at "Henud," and we all had to sleep in one room with the groaning old man. I lay awake for hours that first night, listening to the dreary drone of Bible-reading. The old man's choice of passages of Scripture was morbid, and the things that seemed to give him most comfort sounded horrible to me. I never slept until the girl came to bed.

She was buxom and tremendously affectionate. After a sleepless night I got up at daybreak determined to run away without more delay, and thus escape death from overlying. But she soothed me, promised me nicer things to come, and I postponed my flight. Next night I slept with the old man, and enjoyed a good dreamless sleep. In the morning the ancient man was dead.

I left that hut without breakfast, and ran all the way home to Albert Street; I was made welcome with a beating, and enjoyed it. I was not sent to "Henud" again.

## CHAPTER II

### SCHOOL

THERE were two principal schools in our part of Oxford, the Wesleyan, in Bulwarks Lane, and the Central, which was in the cattle market. I don't know what power aided me, but I actually out-argued Father, and when I left Green Hill School I was entered at the Central. Perhaps the fact that Mother chose this time to present Lizzie and me with a brother weakened Father's resistance, for he had not seemed overjoyed for some time.

In the cattle market on alternate Wednesdays there was such an uproar, such a chaos of terrified beasts, cheapjacks, thieves, horse-copers, and ribald ballad-singers that classes were impossible in the school, so the boys had a standing half-holiday every other Wednesday. That, to be truthful, had been my reason for wanting to go to the Central, and I have no doubt that it was Father's reason for opposing my choice.

To the Central School I went. The school was in two parts, neither of which was ever meant to house a school. The lower classes were held in a combined classroom and gymnasium in a loft over Russell's piano warehouse, with Stroud's funeral stables behind; the higher school, which was conducted in a part of an old church building, was a cold, dismal, repellent place. Yet it was a good school. Many of Oxford's noted men learned "the three Rs" there.

It was cold weather when I commenced, and I had been dressed up for the great occasion in a blue suit, made from Father's old Salvation Army uniform. That suit was made in uniform style, for I was doomed to join the Army soon, and all that would be necessary to fit me for Sunday was to have brass "S"s pinned to my collar. For warmth I wore a blood-red jersey, also part of the regalia for the near future, with

a blazing yellow crest on the bosom and the slogan "Blood & Fire!" I wore an old pair of Mother's elastic-sided boots, and a terrible knitted cap with a long tassel completed my attire. I had fought against the red jersey, without success, but I contrived to put it on 'hind before and hoped to escape notice.

Clothes were forgotten in the thrill of the big school, but in the eleven o'clock interval I was reminded of them. A big kid named Taphouse snatched my awful bonnet and slung it over a high trapeze. The same lad spotted my boots, and stamped on my feet all down the stairs. In the empty cattle pens, our playground, enthusiasm made me forget everything except the grand fact that I was one with this howling mob of boisterous youth let loose for fifteen licensed minutes; but Taphouse had marked me down. In my excitement, chasing a tennis-ball in my first game of football, I forgot my horrible clothes, tore open my jacket, and revealed the blood-red jersey. Taphouse saw it, stripped the jacket from me, and yelled the news to the whole school. Then I was chased and chivvied over pens, around the morgue, and back again until I fell exhausted. When I went home I was well pounded again, for I had lost my knitted bonnet.

That first day at school decided one thing for me: I would never make a runner, so I might as well try fighting. The decision only resulted in my getting hammered more often, but at least I was not compelled to run too, and Taphouse for one never bullied me again once I had stood up to him and made his nose bleed rather more copiously than he had made mine. He had much more blood in him. I always lost fights; but fewer boys picked on me when they found that I wouldn't run.

I liked school, chiefly I think on account of a teacher named Griffiths, who walked in from Cowley every day. He was the son of an old N.C.O. at the Barracks, and in every way a splendid fellow. If the tough lads from the Ragged School came seeking victims, Griffiths would pick out half a dozen of the biggest and toughest and lick them in a bunch. He would twist a fellow's ear in class until the lad

## SCHOOL

squeaked, call him "Donkay!" with inimitable scorn, and afterwards take him for a long country walk and make a chum of him in recompense. We all liked Griffiths. Later on he went to India as tutor to a princeling. He ought to have been made Viceroy.

My father had risen in the world to the extent of a few shillings a week, and now he ate eggs for breakfast, but nobody else had eggs. On Sundays he would chip off the tops of his two boiled eggs and give one top each to Lizzie and me, never failing to impress upon us that eggs were not good for growing children—our digestions were not yet strong enough for such binding food. His one theme was that what had been good enough for him was good enough for us, and I registered a resolve that if ever I had children I should do for them precisely the opposite to everything my father was doing for us.

My lunches, carried to school, consisted of two thick slices of bread and lard, which I always ate in secret, ashamed to have them noticed. In winter I had to run home at noon, take a quart can, and go to stand in line at the Corn Exchange soup kitchen with the City's paupers to buy a quart of pea-soup for a penny. That made me sick with shame, for I knew that soup was for much poorer people than we were. My sister got whipped for refusing to go, and I was beaten with a knobby stick for daring to defend her. Mother stood up for us, pleading for justice, but we got the whacking just the same.

Shortly after I joined the Central School some misguided philanthropist gave my father a tenor horn, and my fate was sealed that day. Into the Army band I was bundled, to be bragged about as the smallest bandsman in Oxford. All that I ever learned was that the thing had three keys, which I must press with three fingers, and different notes were made by widening or narrowing the aperture of the lips. *Boom-pip-pip! Boom-pip-pip! Squee-clunk-clunk! Squee-clunk-clunk! Boom-pom-pom-pip!* One evening a week I practised with the men; every Sunday night I marched from the Martyrs' Memorial in St Giles' to the old theatre in Red Lion Square; now

and then the band visited the Jericho citadel, which was in a kipper-curing loft. But whenever we marched, a horde of boys from the school marched abreast of the band, yelling ribald jeers at me. I got thumped at school on Mondays, but had I refused to march I would have been thumped more hellishly at home—so I tootled my little horn and cursed the Army.

Tom Montague, a rag-and-bone man, played in the band when he could be caught sober; but Tom was a shocking backslider, and liked beer. Once at a band practice Tom tried desperately hard—after a backsliding interval—to master a new march, and when at length he mastered it he sat back and breathed with heartfelt sincerity, “Ah! That’s better beer!”

“Oh, Tom,” groaned Father, “if you’d shun the devil’s brew and all his works I’m sure you’d be a better man.”

“If you didn’t call so many nice things the devil’s works a fellow might blow better,” grumbled Tom. I liked Tom. He let me rummage in his rag-and-bone locker once for some bits of wire to make a catapult. I got enough maggots out of that box to take home to Father for roach bait. Dad was a keen fisherman, and those maggots earned me a few kindly remarks; but I broke a window of the police inspector’s house with the catapult, and got no thanks for that.

Not long after joining the band there was a great international rally of Salvationists at the Crystal Palace, and our band went to it. There was to be a massed band performance of thousands of instruments, and I was shoved forward as the world’s smallest bandsman. There were Kaffirs, Hindus, Russians, Chinese, Dutchmen, Eskimos—almost every race under the sun—and the confusion of tongues was appalling. It was bewildering to a small boy, and I promptly got lost. I was found in the lost children’s tent, in company with a vast assortment of kids of every hue, and I had lost my cap and my tenor horn.

But my luck was dead out. They recovered the horn.

In the rough-and-tumble of school I grew. I was a skinny urchin, with no calves, big ears, and a timidity born of that

infernal band and uniform. I tried to join in games, but was not encouraged. I had by now quite made up my mind that I would go to sea very soon, and my sister promised to steal a blanket for me if ever that great day arrived. But the sea was still far off. I did strive so desperately to engage in sports that Mr Griffiths sensed my trouble and begged Father to let me try a run with the paper-chasing enthusiasts. We ran for miles over Cumnor Hurst and the Hill. I fell into the big tank near Chawley brickyard, and got left behind : and when I arrived home, tired, half drowned, ashamed of my showing for Mr Griffiths' sake, I received a warming because my clothes were spoiled. My schooldays were not very happy.

I brooded over my fancied wrongs, and determined to run away ; but something happened to prevent me. Father was promoted to be manager of the rope-shop, and now earned thirty shillings a week. That was a real rise in life, and naturally the Salvation Army could not be considered any longer. One must think of one's social position, and only poor people went to the Army.

Father joined a chapel, and my tenor horn was sold.

But now there were Sunday-school and chapel to plague me. My small brother could toddle by now, and he, too, must attend morning Sunday-school and morning chapel. He was too small to remain awake for evening service, so my sister or I had to stay at home and mind him. Our Sundays were a double round of school and chapel, with only one break every alternative Sunday night when my sister or I were locked in the house. I saw little to thrill over in such a life. At Sunday-school most of the kids hated it as much as I did, but went because they had to. The 'best' boys played up to their teachers and the parson, and most of them were the veriest toadies, sneaks, and liars ; but they were the ones I was told I must copy. I saw little to admire in them, and tried my best to get turned out of the school ; but now Father rented a pew, like Aunt Lizzie, and put sixpence in the plate every Sunday, and I couldn't get expelled.



Father had told me that as long as I lived under his roof I must go to Sunday-school and chapel twice every week, though I was allowed choice in the matter of Christian Endeavour and Band of Hope. Very soon exasperation drove me to try my runaway act, but Father caught me with my bundle and my sister got a whipping for stealing a blanket for me. So fed up with life was I at that immature age that I played truant from school one morning and went to Port Meadow, where some Army people were experimenting with box-kites for observation purposes. I offered to go up on a kite in place of the dummy they were using, but my offer was refused, though a major did accompany me back to school and beg me off a caning for playing truant.

Brighter days dawned for me when St Mary's Church wanted a new batch of choirboys and the choirmaster visited all the City schools in search of talent. The choirmaster was at that time the famous Dr Monk, of Radley, who wrote the music for the hymn *Abide with Me*. I was one of the lucky ones, and ran home all puffed with pride to announce my selection. At the word 'church' I was almost annihilated with a look; but when I hastened to say that I was to be paid for singing Father looked as if he at last realized that he might have overlooked some quality in me. I was to get only ten shillings a quarter for my singing; but I think I had jam for tea that day.

## CHAPTER III

### I ENTER THE CHURCH

**D**URING my school and choir days Father rose as far as he ever got in this life. He was manager of the little rope-shop, and his salary was increased to forty-one shillings a week, which was the most he ever received. He also became a committee-man in the local Co-op., secretary of a Lodge of Odd-fellows, and also held some office or other in the chapel. On Sundays now he wore a clawhammer coat and top-hat, and a gold watch-chain which was polished with extreme care every Sunday morning. At various times as his material condition improved he had joined the Baptists, the Christadelphians, the Wesleyans, and the Methodists, finally sticking to the Primitive Methodists. Each had in turn been the Only Creed, or sect, and when at last he had settled upon one all the rest became false. Even as a boy I saw little to admire or respect in the paltry conflict between all the unimportant divisions of the Church.

I rather liked St Mary's. It seemed dignified after the Army and chapel; we wore surplices, and sometimes I sang a solo. The vicar, Mr ffoulkes, was so old that he could scarcely read the service; he wore glasses which wobbled precariously on the bulbous tip of a quivering nose. There was a fine curate, Mr Gorman, beloved by all the boys. It was Mr Gorman who led us on our yearly 'beating the bounds'; and he also organized the cricket-match which wound up the day. It was Mr Gorman who, when I fell down into a cellar in All Souls and thereby missed the usual silver scramble, dug down into his lean pocket and produced for me one of his scarce threepenny bits with which to ease the combined pangs of a broken head and disappointment.

After two years at St Mary's I began to consider myself a real lad. Having read in *The Boy's Own Paper*, or *Chums*, or

some similar periodical, that men of an adventurous bent invariably wore out their boots on the outer edge of the sole, I cultivated my gait to achieve that result. Another choice bit culled from the papers was that men of determination could be recognized by a strong jaw, a square chin. My chin was negligible. It was my ears that marked me. They stood out from my head like stu'ns'ls, and my nose was sharp and long; I was nobody's ideal of beauty. All the same, I trod on the outer edge of my boot soles, stuck my lower teeth outside the uppers at all times except when eating or sleeping, and was sure that the world would know me yet as a daring, dreadnought fellow. I suffered torment from jaw cramp, but I persevered; and every time I saw my reflection in the mirror I perceived a ghostly shade behind me—a composite of Drake, Gordon, and Jem Mace.

I was more than ever determined to go to sea, but Father refused to hear of it. Sometimes he discussed (as he called it) my future, but the discussion was always a monologue, with only one climax: I was certainly doomed to the gallows. Our talks never took the line: "What would you like to do?" or "What do you want to be?" They were always: "You'll have to be—" or "You'd better make up your mind to come into the shop." That shop was ever horribly before my eyes. The present combined errand-boy and shopman was earning six shillings a week, and he had been there four years. If he stayed there for twenty years he might get a pound. If I went to the shop, poor Harry Ellis would be sacked to make for me a job which I didn't want in the least. I know that I remarked upon the injustice of the plan, and of course I fell foul of Father again.

A lot of Old Boys had gone to sea, and usually paid us a visit after voyages. What heroes! Pecker Jennings, Bummer Earl, Fiery Virgo—all resplendent with brass buttons and gold cap-badges. They could swear, and smoke, and spit like men. One of them gave me a clay pipe and a piece of plug tobacco, showing me how to shave up the tobacco in my palm; but a new clay and ship's plug are hard on immature stomachs, and I retired below very quickly. I dropped the pipe down the

closet, but I held on to the bit of plug, and when the world again stopped staggering I felt that I had definitely climbed one ratline in the rigging of manhood. More than ever was I determined to be a sailor.

I received a small increase in choir pay after a while, but I omitted to report it at home. I saw no reason why I should. I was permitted to keep only threepence out of my quarterly ten shillings; my only other income, apart from occasional pennies from deaf Aunt Lydia, was a penny weekly, for which I cleaned all the family boots and the knives. I was growing up, had spoken to sailors, and smoked plug. When the new half-crown increase came, therefore, I hooked on to it. I gave my sister a shilling, for she, poor kid, was as poor as I, for all her fifteen years. She bought herself a bit of finery to brighten up her ugly clothes, and when Father asked where she got the money she refused to give me away. She stuck to her refusal when threatened with a whipping. She was fifteen, and knew she ought not to be whipped, but she was. Father had been amusing himself by making a fearful cat-o'-nine-tails for display in the shop; and this was what he produced for Lizzie. I never believed he would dare use that on a girl, so I stood aside. But he slashed it heavily across my sister's shoulders, and that was all I saw; for I tangled up with him, tooth and claw, swearing like a gutter rat, fastening my teeth in his hand. When the red fog cleared, Lizzie was crying on the stairs, Mother was binding up Father's hand, and I was shivering in the passage with the cat-o'-nine-tails in my fist.

"I'll see to you when I come home, my lad," Father promised me as he left for the mid-week service.

I got an awful beating that night, but Lizzie was never whipped again.

Towards the end of schooldays I won a place in the football team, and played one game. Then the bill for boots and colours went in to Father, and . . . well, another International was spoiled in the making. Father told me he had better ways of spending his money, and he knew of far better ways for me to spend my time. Every Saturday thenceforth I must go to the shop and run errands, at a penny each for town customers, and

twopence for outlying places like Botley, Summertown, Headington, and Hinksey. It made no difference what I carried—a bundle of tarred hurdle-cord or thatching twine that almost broke my skinny back; a bundle of doormats, coalsacks, or a sixpenny ball of twine—a penny or twopence was the pay. I went through College at Oxford all right—I passed through every college from porter's gate to kitchen, loaded down like a 'scout' at the end of term. Subtly the thin edge of the wedge was being driven in. I foresaw that I would be taken from school soon, and landed in that shop to be a beast of burden at five bob a week. Things were bound to come to a climax.

The shop itself was a very old business, established in the days of Nelson, and the firm had made bellropes for half the churches and cathedrals in England. I don't know how it came about, but a shipowner in London had assumed control of the business and apparently cared little what happened to it so long as two pounds weekly were paid to the widow of the last survivor of the old firm. What I did know was that by a miracle my father had intercourse with a shipowner, and I never ceased to worry him to send me to sea. He stubbornly refused to consider it, and I grew difficult. I'm afraid I was no nice little boy.

At last, one Sunday in the church vestry, I caught a mouse and we played with it while putting on our surplices. Somebody came in unexpectedly, and I popped the mouse into the funny silk bag that hangs behind a parson's pulpit rig. Luck made it the Vicar's. When the choir and clergy paced solemnly down the chancel and under the organ loft towards the choir stalls, the mouse ran up the Vicar's back and over his bald head. He uttered a very loud "Damnation!" and dropped his book.

I got the sack, and was rather glad of it, for I had grown terribly tired of hearing that old man's droning voice week after week; but I reckoned without Father. He didn't rave at me as I had expected, but simply said that I must recommence attending chapel and Sunday-school. I flatly refused, and he calmly declared that as long as I remained under his roof . . . etc. I told him I would leave his house, but he only regarded me queerly and waited for Sunday. When I went home that

## I ENTER THE CHURCH

Sunday evening, after having attended neither school nor chapel, I found the door locked against me.

I spent that night walking around Binsey, Medley, and Osney, and stole home after Father had gone to work. Mother had gone out with him, hoping to find some clue to my whereabouts. My sister told me that Mother had cried all night, pleading with Father to adopt a gentler way with me. I packed my bundle again, Lizzie gave me some food and some of Father's socks, and added a precious hoarded sixpence of her own.

Off I started for London.

To avoid notice I took the tow-path to Iffley, crossed the lock, and reached the London road beyond Headington. I walked rapidly, not because of the fear behind so much as for the hope ahead; and it was well past Wheatley that Father overtook me. He had borrowed a baker's pony and trap, and set out after me when my sister broke down before Mother's tears and confessed my destination.

"I'll have no more of this!" Father announced grimly. "If it's the sea you want, you shall have it, and I'll take good care you get a bellyful of it. Get into the trap!"

## CHAPTER IV

### I GO TO SEA

My mother died while I was getting ready for my great adventure, and delayed the day. I don't think she had enjoyed a very pleasant life; perhaps less family washing and better food might have enabled her to defeat the heart disease that killed her.

My brother was growing up as I had grown, skinny, ill-nourished, and generally miserable; Mother's death distressed him terribly. To my surprise it upset me too. I realized now that she had been good to me. She never believed, as others did, that I was bound to come to a bad end; many a time had I been saved a beating by her quiet pleading. Her death only intensified my longing to get away from home.

My sister was established as housekeeper, and I saw much better days ahead for her. My brother had started school, and Father suddenly showed him a lot of kindness. It seemed altogether to be a good time for me to depart, and I again began to plague Father about that ship. He spoke to the ship-owner, and very soon afterwards the Great Day was at hand.

All through a restless night I dreamed of a tall clipper, all snowy sails and bubbling foam; of a smart young midshipman glittering with brass and gold, pacing the poop with telescope under arm; while tobacco-chewing tars ran to my orders and touched their forelocks in reverence. I was quite certain that mine would be a far finer ship than any other Central School boy had sailed in; I would be captain of her in no time at all, because my father knew the owner. Lizzie shared my views, and stole a blanket for me again. I think perhaps her mind ran so much on blankets because our beds were never too well covered.

Many books have been written by sailors, who have fully described the manner of a boy joining his first ship. Usually a

lad is taken on board, dumped down in a grimy, littered half-deck in a state of bewilderment, and informed merely that this is to be his future home. Usually there is an old boy, a senior apprentice, smoking a foul pipe, wearing a battered cap, adept at dodging the mate and full of wise advice and tall yarns. My going to sea, however, was not at all like that.

Father put me on the London train at Oxford, and gave me thirty shillings with which to buy my outfit when I reached Town. A brother of the owner met me, gave me some lunch, and at once took me down to the East India Docks. I had never seen the sea or set eyes on a real ship before. The dock was full of vessels, and to my eyes that was Paradise. I felt that each splendid ship must be mine, and as we passed along I read: *Macquarie, Hesperus, Turakina, Pericles, Orestes, Aristides*. What names! I gazed through a mist with a choke in my throat. Still we walked along. If these were not to be mine then what magnificent lady of the sea was I destined for?

At the end of the dock lay steamers, *Grantully Castle, Hawarden Castle, Damascus*, and the like, but my glance swept over them in scorn. Not for me the grime and groaning of a coal-fed liner. Who would go to sea in a steamer? I timidly asked my patron which was my ship, and he pointed broadly and indifferently to where I only saw a great four-masted barque and a lovely little full-rigged ship. Ah, my hungry soul could rest satisfied with either! I read the big four-master's name, *Bracadale*: passing her, there lay the lovely clipper, *Hesperides*! What a name for a boy's first ship—and how I loved her already!

We turned sharply beneath the jib-boom of the barque; I had my eyes glued to the gangway of the *Hesperides*; but my arm was seized, and I was dragged a bit farther on to the gangway of a stubby, dirty, iron-decked atrocity of a cargo steamer. Before I had digested the hard fact I was on her unlovely deck, and I saw her name on a lifebuoy—*Godiva*.

The name was good enough—but I still refused to accept it. Of course a shipowner might have business aboard several ships, and mine after all would be that last tall clipper lying beyond the lock gates, her brasswork glittering in the sun, her



lofty spars ruled in white by newly bent and furled canvas. Of course that would be my ship; she at once outshone all other ships in dock.

"Here we are, young fellow!" My guide shoved me up an iron ladder to the bridge-deck of the *Godiva*, and I stumbled over the top step. Work was over for the day; the decks lay dirty and deserted; all my dreams went out like a puff of smoke. Where was the broad expanse of snowy plank, holly-stoned to the whiteness of a hound's tooth? Where the brass-work, the smart officers, the quidding shellbacks?

"In here," said my pilot, and we entered a door out of which poured a powerful aroma of bilge-water, sugar, cockroaches, damp, and rust; and then somebody in a white jacket loomed through the shadows.

"Hullo, steward," I heard, "look after this lad, will you, and let the captain see him in the morning."

The flunkey took me in hand, and carried my little box across the saloon to a tiny room. I was almost resigned to steamers, for the man showed me a deference which I took to be my due. This would be Romance in capitals, for in all my voracious reading I had never encountered even a middy who owned a state-room like this. There was a white bunk, mahogany drawers, red curtains over a brass-rimmed porthole, and two funny brass candlesticks that bobbed about if you touched them. I gaped around me. Through the porthole I could see the weedy piles of the dock, and now the strong stench that had smitten me on entry was changed into a fragrance of coral isles and far horizons. I remembered all I had read of stuffy half-decks, and swelled with superior pride. This was the cabin of a sailor—future Commodore of the Line!

"I suppose your father gave you money to buy your outfit?" said the shipowner in the doorway.

"Yes, sir, plenty," said I eagerly. Already I was taking sights with a dream-formed sextant.

"Well, don't get swindled. The steward will tell you what you'll need. You ought to get everything for about ten pounds. Take care of yourself, and good luck."

So exalted was I that he had gone ashore before the full

significance of what he said struck me. Ten pounds! And I had thirty shillings. I'd ask the steward at once, since he was no doubt to be my personal attendant. I groped in the semi-darkness of the saloon, and as I was about to venture a bold call for "Steward!" he appeared, dressed for the shore. He spoke before I could find my tongue.

"Be'ave yerself, young feller-me-lad. There's some bread an' meat in the pantry, and you can 'ave some 'ot tea in the galley when the watchman makes 'is. Stop aboard, me lad, and don't go runnin' arter no dirty wimmen." He thrust me towards the pantry, and then hurried ashore.

I came out of a daze when silence fell upon the saloon again. For the first time in my life here I was left alone to feed myself on more food than would have sufficed my whole family for a company dinner. In the little pantry I found a huge dish of sliced cold mutton, a loaf of bread, a jar of pickles, and a whole pot of jam! Who wanted 'ot tea? I didn't. I stood up to the food and ate until ready to burst. Somebody had said that the sea is a dog's life. If this was what Father thought would cure me, I'd write him a letter of kindness that very night and put him right. As for those Old Boys who visited the school—Fiery Virgo had lied. So had Pecker Jennings, and Bummer Earl, and Fatty Turner. Their tall yarns of salt horse, and dog's-body, and dandy-funk, and maggotty hard-tack—what a lot of lies!

When I could eat no more, I explored the saloon, lit now by a low-turned lamp, and looked into all the little state-rooms that opened from it. In one, which had a metal plate marked "Master" over the door, I found paper and envelopes. I sat at the Master's desk and wrote a letter home.

"The *Godiva* is a magnificent steamship," I wrote to Father. "She's as long as Albert Street. I have a cabin opposite the captain's and have a steward all to myself. You must have been reading a lot of silly sea-stories. I shall not come home until I am captain."

I put the letter in my pocket for posting in the morning, and wandered out on-deck. The lights of the wharves shone through the rigging of the tall ships; beyond the gates sounded

the clack of trams; beyond the locks the medley of river sounds made a muted chorus. Across the dock a ship was heaving out, and the last slings of her cargo went aboard even as she moved. Men shouted, and I thrilled to the movement of the scene. In a day or two I also would be going to sea, shouting like a man.

I peeped into a dark hole in which shone a red glare.

"Hullo! Who be you?" demanded the rusty voice of the night-watchman, busy about that 'ot tea of which I was so disdainful.

"I'm the new apprentice," I said importantly. The man gave a grunt.

"'Prentice? In this bloody ole wagon?"

"She isn't a wagon!" I retorted, and added, determined to put this man in his place: "My steward said I could get some tea here."

"Ho, you got a stooard, 'ave yer?" the man answered, standing straight to get a good look at me. "Werry well, Hadmiral. Tea, says you, an' tea you shall 'ave. Where's yer pannikin?"

Now I wanted no tea, but that "Hadmiral" gave me a thirst. I fished out sixpence and gave it to the man, saying I had no pannikin at present. He spat on the coin, handed me his own heavy china mug, and made room for me on top of the coal bunker. I sipped at the syruppy, scalding stuff, while the watchman regarded me silently. The outward-bound ship moved across my line of sight from the galley door, and I inquired nonchalantly:

"Where's that clipper bound for?"

Then the watchman laughed loudly.

"Clipper, sonny? Blest if you ain't a joker. That ain't nothink but a bald-'eaded, starved-gutted old soft-wood Baltic trader." In the gloom I found him scrutinizing me closely.

"I s'pose you ain't got no 'baccy, Hadmiral? Don't smoke yet, eh?"

"Oh, yes, I smoke, but I haven't got any on me. I'll bring you some," I promised rashly. "I have to buy my outfit. Where's the best place?"

I had meant to get my outfit the next day; but suddenly I was bitten by the bug of adventure, and this silly old man's line of chatter made the irritation worse.

"You go down Crisp Street," said he. "It ain't fur. What ye goin' to buy?"

"I was going to ask the steward," I answered, "but he went ashore."

"Don't you trust stooards," the watchman said decidedly. "They ain't no manner o' use. You listen to me. I been goin' to sea nigh on fifty year, and wot I don't know ain't wuth knowin'." It didn't occur to me then to doubt the wisdom of a man who, after fifty years at sea, had attained to nothing better than the job of a watchman on a grubby little steamer in dock. But he was telling me things.

"Fust you want oilskins an' sea-boots. Don't let 'em shove orf no 'Merican injyrubber boots on to you. Leather, that's the ticket—wiv wood pegs. An' matches—plenty o' matches. Soap, too—you'll want lots o' soap. Git yer drawers an' singlets big enough fer a man my size, sonny—they'll shrink like 'ell wiv washin'. You bring 'em aboard and I'll go over 'em for you. I'll do that for a nice young feller as is goin' to bring me a bit o' 'baccy."

He conducted me to the gangway, and pointed towards the big main gate.

"Now you go out the gate, stroll past the Tunnel, bear left, then turn right, and wander along 'Igh Street. P'raps you won't 'ave to go as fur as Crisp Street to find all you want." As I ran down the gangway he called after me:

"You got beddin', I s'pose?"

"I have one blanket," I said, stopping, bewildered at the amount of gear I had to get.

"Blanket—huh! You 'ave to git a donkey's breakfast, and a piller, and a couple more blankets. Don't let them Jews sell yer no dog's wool, neither. I wish I could go wiv yer, me lad. You got mess gear, I s'pose?"

"I haven't anything but one Witney blanket," I said gloomily. "What's a donkey's breakfast, sir?" I was impressed by the man's vast knowledge, and slowly retraced my steps on

board. It was useless starting out only half knowing what I went for.

"A donkey's breakfast is a straw bed," he said shortly. "You want a tin pannikin, a tin plate—a big 'un—a big spoon, and a knife—a sheath knife as'll serve ye for everything. And you let me see that there Witney blanket. I ain't sure that's any good to a sailor."

I ran to my box, hauled out my blanket all redolent of lavender, and took it to the galley. The watchman sniffed.

"Stinks, that do!" he declared. "That ain't no manner o' use. It'll git all mouldy wiv sea-water. You leave me take that, me boy, and I'll bring you a good 'un from me missus to-morrer."

It cost me a pang to part with Lizzie's gift; but I couldn't go to sea with landlubberly gear—that was no way for a sailor! I left it in the galley, and made another start.

I gave my cap a tilt, buttoned the lower button of my jacket, and strode down the gangway again. I wished I had a uniform, but it was dark, and perhaps if luck were kind I'd meet no brassbound lads from other ships to make me feel at a disadvantage. My trousers were too short, my coat too tight, but Father had insisted that they were plenty good enough to spoil at sea. I have wondered since how much Father really knew about ships and sea ways; and I suspect he knew a great deal more than I had ever given him credit for.

Outside the big gates I plunged into the stream of Poplar night life, and it flew to my head like strong liquor. I put on a nautical roll, and lurched along, puzzled because nobody seemed to recognize in me the new boy of the *Godiva*.

In the High Street the noise and smell and movement fascinated me. I was feeling splendid, when four real brassbounders wearing the cap-badge of Devitt and Moore came swaggering out of a pub, their pipes going at full blast. I flattened myself against a shop window, all my splendour dead within me. There went the sailors. I was nothing but a skinny greenhorn in a shoddy townie's suit, going to sea in a dirty little steamer.

A bulky youth trod on my feet as he turned to shout ribald witticisms after the splendid four. He kept shouting as long as

he could see their caps over the crowd, and just before they disappeared one of them shouted back:

"Go jump in the dock, Mickey. Sing out 'Here goes nothing!'"

I listened in awe. That lad must be indeed a hero. Then Mickey turned, swearing under his breath, trod upon me again, and noticed me for the first time. He peered into my face. He was ragged, but his old clothes had the true nautical cut, though he wore a common cloth cap like mine. His mouth was slack and crooked, and one corner of the lower lip hung outward. His eye was bright and shifty.

"Hullo, my old brown son," he chuckled. "Didn't I see you going aboard the *Godiva* this afternoon?"

"Yes, with the owner," I said eagerly. "I've joined her."

"You're lucky. I've joined her too. I'll look after you. What's your name?"

I told him.

"Mine's Davron," he said, "Mickey Davron. You saw me pipe down that lot o' brassbound pups, didn't you? *Harbinger* pups, they are. I was in the *Harbinger* once. The mate got jealous. I knew too much for him." His shifty eye wandered. "I'd buy a drink, but I'm a bit close-hauled until we sign on to-morrow. Got any dibs?"

I confessed to having a little money, but said I must first buy my outfit. His bright eye danced anew.

"You couldn't have struck more lucky, my son. I'll show you the ropes. They'll fleece you down here unless I'm with you. They all know me, though."

As we strolled along the glaring street I told Mickey all about the watchman and the blanket. Mickey had slowed down by a brightly lit theatre in the doorway of which loitered a little gang of most friendly girls, and I don't think he had heard much of what I said until I mentioned that blanket. We moved on, and he took my arm.

"That's the Queen's," he remarked, jerking his head towards the music-hall. "I'll stand treat to-morrow. I know all those tarts. Did you say you had a Witney blanket, though? You take it from me, that watchman's going to diddle you out of it."

Tell him to take a running jump at himself and hang on to it." Mickey licked his slack lips. "I'd stand treat if I wasn't so close-hauled," he sighed, halted, and glanced over the red blind of a pub. I felt ashamed of myself. Here was a real salty sailor condescending to be seen in my company, advising me for my own good, and suffering from thirst. He was going to save me money, too.

"I'll stand treat," I offered impulsively, "but only one—until after I've bought my things."

I drank a glass of beer—my first—and the taste nauseated me; while the bold Mickey sucked down a pint of four-ale, with half a quartern of gin in it, at one noisy draught. His eye was brighter when we left the pub and turned into a side-street lined with stalls which displayed under flaring paraffin lamps all manner of things from live rabbits to clothing, and from tin kettles to pottery chamber-vases.

"Here we are," said Mickey, and began to paw things over, asking me the while just what gear I possessed in that little box of mine. I told him, and he turned his roving eye upon me in indignant protest.

"Then what the hell are you spending good money here for? All you want is oilskins and boots and dungarees, and you can get them all out of the slop-chest when we get to sea. Don't you be a fool and chuck good money away on these Sheenies. Your old man will pay the skipper's account when you get home. Here, my lad"—to the stall-keeper—"wrap up a pannikin and spoon, a plate and knife. Soap? Matches? How much is all that? What? You bloody robber! I know you, Mo! You robbed me last voyage, but you don't rob this decent young fellow."

I thought Mickey wonderful. The shipowner had told me not to spend more than ten pounds for my outfit, my father's notion ran to thirty bob, but here right on the spot I had found a real sailor, a man of experience, who taught me the ropes and saved me twenty out of my thirty shillings. I tucked my parcel under my arm and followed Mickey back into High Street.

"Now we can have a drink, and I'll take you to the

Queen's," said Mickey. The second glass of beer tasted much better than the first; it sent a mild glow through me. The third was very good indeed, and I felt quite a man. We emerged upon the street again, and two very young apprentices passed us in all the glory of new brass buttons. They were eating sweets greedily, apparently quite content. Perhaps, had I ever known the proper, normal life of a boy, I might have been eating sweets too, and the better for it; as things were, I considered myself much the better man, drinking my beer, swaggering into the music-hall at Mickey's heels, a good many months short of fifteen years old.

In the music-halls of that day waiters served drinks to patrons in their seats. When we entered the Queen's there was a ripe aroma of fish and chips, beer, and shag, with the ordinary reek of sweating humanity. The Chairman sat at the head of a table before the orchestra, and his cronies sat around him looking very self-conscious and important, scanning the house for possible acquaintances to whom to nod. The audience sang every chorus, until the house seemed to rock. I drank more beer; Mickey drank more 'dog's noses.' A beautiful girl, wearing very few clothes indeed—utterly inadequate to confine her abundant charms—sang feelingly:

"I'm so modest and so sedate,  
I never go out on the mash, I never stay out late.  
Is there anybody here who wants a loving mate?  
Say, boys, let me know!"

She smiled straight at me as she asked that yearning question, and I went hot all over. I ordered more beer, and Mickey whispered hoarsely to me that if he had not been close-hauled he'd stand treat too. I lent him five shillings, but I don't remember whether he stood treat or not, because just about then the stage started to sail about the theatre, my seat was tossed on a mad sea. There must have been an interval of blankness, for the next thing I knew was the cold air upon my face and the *Godiva's* gangway writhing crazily before me.

"Come on, my son. You find your bunk and get your head down. I'm going to find that watchman and talk to him about your blanket," Mickey told me, shoving me up the iron ladder



on to the bridge-deck. I must have found my room, for that's where I awoke in the morning to find the steward shaking me savagely.

I had been horribly sick during the night. He regarded the fouled room with a fishy eye, but having seen me come aboard with the owner I expect he played safe, for he told me to get my breakfast and be ready to meet the captain.

I wanted no breakfast, and said so.

"Get on with it, my lad," the man said grimly. "You'll want somethink inside yer belly when the Old Man starts sayin' a few remarks to yer." He led me into the saloon, and pushed me into a chair. One place was laid on a white tablecloth, and dazed as I felt I was aroused at sight of that meal. There were bread, butter, coffee—and three eggs! For me, who had never in my life seen more than the chipped top of an egg on my plate! My appetite revived, and I fell to ravenously, feeling a lot better as the food sank inside me. While I scraped the jam-pot Captain Wandless arrived, and stared at me in astonishment. The steward told him who I was.

"Oh, him!" the captain grunted. "What the hell is he doing here? Tell Mr Clark to show him the fo'c'sle, then make me some strong coffee."

Captain Wandless entered the room labelled "Master" and shut the door without another glance at me. The steward licked his lips, ran to the pantry to put on the coffee-pot, and then came and grabbed me.

"Pick it up!" he snapped, shoving my box at me. He hoisted it upon my shoulder, gripped my arm, and led me beyond hearing of the captain. Then he let go everything.

"You sneakin' little Jew-nosed barstard!" he panted. "Kiddin' me you was the owner's friend! You wait till I get you to sea! Eatin' good cabin grub—spewin' over my bedclo'es!" At each step he punctuated his remarks with a heavy boot against my stern. My head ached, and that box seemed to be full of lead.

"Ugh! Dirty little fag-end of a sojer's Satidy night!" he concluded as the second mate appeared in sight.

Mr Clark had seen many boys start their sea careers, and he

glanced at me with a queer look in his eyes. He was old—twice as old as the captain—grizzled, and thin. He curtly bade me follow him forward, through the tangle of ropes and hatch covers, dunnage wood and cane mats, to an iron door beyond which was a dark, dirty, bleak place in which were six wooden bunks and nothing else that I could see.

“Dump your gear into one of those bunks, boy, and get into working clothes as quick as you like,” the second mate told me. “Want to be a sailor, eh? Well, better men than you’ll ever be have made that mistake. I’ll give you a start right away.”

When Mr Clark stepped outside to give some orders to the shore gang who were just starting work, in stepped the watchman, who was going off duty. He looked ugly, and as soon as the second mate was out of hearing he grabbed me.

I was already feeling very sorry for myself; my pockets were empty; somewhere I had lost the few poor things purchased in Crisp Street. I wanted to be sick again and to lie down, and those bare board bunks looked like soft couches stuffed with angels’ feathers to me. But I had received my first sea order, and Mr Clark was waiting for me outside.

“Let go of me, you old fool!” I snarled.

The watchman cuffed my throbbing head.

“See ’ere, me lad, did you tell that drunk larst night to take that there blanket wot you give me?”

“I didn’t give it to you!” I yelled.

“Ho, didn’t you? Well, I was goin’ to fetch you a proper one from my missus, wasn’t I? Now that drunken dock-walloper swiped it. I tried to save it for yer, and he tried to chuck me into the dock. He pinched it orf me.”

“You meant to steal it anyhow. I’d rather he had it,” I said viciously; and, ducking under his arm, I ran out to find the second mate. Mr Clark regarded me as he might a fish with feet.

“Is that all the working gear you’ve got?” he asked. His voice was sharp, but I believed I detected kindness in it. “Haven’t you got any dungarees?”

“I’m getting them from the slopchest, sir,” I said hopefully. He raised his eyebrows, and led me to the bosun’s locker.

"I don't know whether you're an old soldier, or just a bloody young fool," he commented, snatching a wad of cotton waste from a bale and pouring oil into a tin. "Here, scrape up some brickdust. It's lucky you landed in this old Demerara sugar box, instead of starting out in a windbag bound round Cape Stiff. Let's see if you can clean brass."

I scoured brasswork all that morning until my fingers were raw. I seemed to be the only member of the crew. My dinner was a very different affair from yesterday's supper or this morning's breakfast; I ate it in the galley, in company with a six-foot nigger cook who stank of rum and regaled me with horrible stories about his overnight amorous adventures. All the romance had gone out of life. I looked across the dock at the tall ships and the happy lads, and almost decided there and then against a career at sea.

Then at two o'clock I was told to get ashore and follow the second mate to the Sailors' Home to sign on. I threaded the seething streets in a daze. At the Home I saw Mickey Davron, who kept winking at me in a sly fashion. The captain was there to sign on the crew, consisting of four able seamen, two ordinary seamen, three firemen, a trimmer, three engineers, a donkeyman, bosun, carpenter, steward, messboy, two mates, and me. There was not one bit of brass or gold among the lot—a dirty crowd. There were only two Britishers among the deck hands—Mickey and myself; the rest were Norwegians, Swedes, and one Finn. Mickey was nothing but an ordinary seaman after all! He who had assured me that he had been a quartermaster in a P. & O. liner after quitting the splendid *Harbinger*.

"We sail at ten to-night, men. Come aboard sober," the mate warned his part of the crew. The chief engineer said nothing to his men, who were drunk already. Everybody else, except the officers, went off to spend their advance: I went back to scour brass.

I wasn't in love with a sea life then; but that night I was told off to stand by a line on the wharf when the ship began to warp out, and all seemed right again. I was at once one with the ship, a part of her; and what if I had to run to overtake

the ship in the lock, and nobody seemed to care whether I got on board safely or not? That, I knew, was the way of the sea. I clambered on board with a thrill, feeling already the salt in my veins.

The lock closed behind the *Godiva*; the outer gate opened; our syren blared dryly; and then we moved grandly out into the mysterious river, bound for Demerara.

Damn it all! Sailing-ships were backbreaking, obsolete work-houses. I was going to sea in a *real* ship.

## CHAPTER V

### FIVE BOB A MONTH

I SHALL remember my first night at sea until I slip my cable for the last long voyage.

Until long past midnight I hauled with chilled fingers on wet, muddy wires and hawsers, my miserable, unfleshed back aching until I could have whimpered with the torture. In the blackness I was trampled upon, shouldered aside, and cursed in Scandinavian which I could only understand from the force behind the words, and in English about which there could be no uncertainty whatever. Twice I tumbled down the iron ladder from the fo'c'sle head, tripping over devil-possessed wires; then I was sent aft to haul on more lines with the second mate.

Mr Clark was as profane as Mr Jones, the mate; but somehow I felt that Mr Clark had sympathy with a boy fresh from home. The ship slid down the river, but I saw nothing of her progress. I tore my hand on a wire, and cursed it with every curse I remembered.

"None o' that, boy!" Mr Clark growled, clumping me on the head. The next minute he cursed Mickey Davron for a useless two-left-legged lump in such terms as I had never believed the human tongue could utter. And Mickey, of whom chief mates were jealous, answered never a word!

I had signed on for five shillings a month, and when at last Mr Clark told me to go forward I had earned a month's wages, with a thumping bonus. A man had gone to the wheel, one to the look-out; the rest were in the fo'c'sle, smoking, passing bottles around, filling the stuffy den with confusion of tongues and movement as each man unpacked his sea bag and made up his bunk. I looked for my poor property in vain. In each bunk lay a donkey's breakfast, straw pillow, and such shore clothes as the owner possessed;

in the bunk where I had deposited my gear another man's bed lay. I was weary enough to be angry. In my half-broken, piping voice I slung names at the owner of that bed, and started to haul the pile of gear out.

"Hey, jung feller, vat t' hell . . ."

A hand all knuckles and wristbones grabbed me and hurled me headlong.

"Ay poot a het on yu!" a lean ordinary seaman threatened me.

"It's my bunk!" I screamed, and made for it again.

At school that ancient myth had been implanted in me of the ability of one Englishman to lick two Frenchmen, three Germans, or four Portuguese. I never heard how many Scandinavians, but knew it must be more than two. I scowled at Tom Anderson, and went for his bed again, hauling it on to the filthy floor.

My ear seemed to explode. I flew through the air, and fell with a crash against the iron cable pipe, while the men paused in their preparations to watch the sport. I got up, spat on my hands, and flew at Tom, squealing like a rat with rage. I clung to him, kicking and striking, and he handled me as he might have handled a cat.

Whoever started that silly yarn about licking foreigners simply because you are English was a damned liar. Foreigners refused to believe it anyhow. Somebody now discovered my box, shoved far under a bunk, and stopped Tom Anderson from beating me. I don't believe Anderson would have more than cuffed me, had I not gone stark crazy and called him every sort of dirty foreigner.

"There is sefen hants, ant six bunks. Somet'ing is wrong," stated Andreas, the lamptrimmer. "Leafe ta boy alone, Tom."

I caught sight of my Witney blanket in the lull, hanging over a bunk among a lot of litter. It was unmistakable, and I grabbed it. I had no bed, apparently there was no bunk for me, but that blanket I was determined to have if I died for it.

"Hey, me son, take your hooks off that!" It was Mickey who seized me now; but Mickey was by no means the hot

lad he had set up to be. Mr Clark had convinced me of that. I hung on to the blanket.

"It's mine, you Irish pig! You stole it!" I sobbed, and Mickey followed Tom Anderson's example, knocking me end-ways. I was in for a bad time when a champion appeared to aid me.

"Ay t'ink yu leafe ta boy alone, hey!" Andreas said quietly. "To-morrow ve see about fighting." Andreas took Mickey by the neck and hauled him away from me. Mickey made some pointed comment, and in an instant was sent thudding over the top of me. He stayed there, swearing poisonously, but cannily lying still, while Andreas returned placidly to his own bedmaking.

That night I slept on two sea-chests, with no other bedding or covering than my Witney blanket. I suppose I was not important enough to be called with the watch, for it was daylight when I was hauled from my hard bed to find three seamen drinking coffee from a black kettle and eating flinty biscuit. Sore, as if every bone in my body were broken, and still woozy from utter fatigue, I picked myself from the floor, while the man who had hauled me off the chests rummaged in one for some working gear. Another man thrust a huge ship's biscuit at me, and proffered the kettle. I tried to bite the hard-tack, but made little impression on it.

"Ain't yu got no pannikin?" the man queried kindly.

I had not, but said nothing. I was too miserable.

The ship was pitching into the short seas, and rolling heavily. A mug of scalding liquid was put into my hand, and I tried to drink. It was called coffee, bitter as gall, with neither sugar nor milk to help it. I gagged on it, and handed back the mug without thanks.

"Ta boy is seasick," the man laughed.

"I'm not!" I retorted angrily. "I don't like coffee without sugar or milk."

"Yu go ant tell ta mate Ay sent yu for ta milk," the man said gravely. "It is late dis morning."

I was starting to go, but at that moment the bosun put his head inside the door.

"Now, my sons—turn to!" he bawled.

I followed the men out on deck, my stomach banging against my backbone, and my legs full of ice-water. My job was brasswork again.

For two hours I rubbed at the bridge brasswork with teased rope-yarns dipped in oil and brickdust. That damned old sugar drogher had more brasswork than a liner, and it was rougher and dirtier. The dirt clung to it like tar. Not for me the thrill of washing decks in a bubble of sluicing brine, not for me the jolly squeegee; not a brass button or gold cap-badge to soften the sordidness of the task. I scoured brass, and every time Mr Jones passed me in his pacing of the bridge he put his hand to my work and found fault. He made me do it over again, and I registered then a hatred for mates which lasted many a day.

As boy, I carried the breakfast from the galley to the fo'c'sle; and as the watch ate they discussed me. I had no gear, there was no bunk for me, I was just an extra hand in the ship without any rights except the right to work. It was Andreas who took me in hand. He made me open my box, and went over every bit of gear in it. There were old clothes, but little else. Near the bottom we came upon a Jubilee mug, with Queen Victoria's portrait on it, and I grinned at that mug. My sister must have put it in my box. It reminded me of the school treat where I got it, celebrating the Good Queen's Jubilee. It also reminded me of a visit to Windsor, when a lot of kids were lined up beside the road while a regal carriage rolled past, in which sat a little fat woman who seemed to look at us as if she were smelling burnt rubber.

"There is your pannikin, Skimps," Andreas said. He named me Skimps offhand, but that name stuck to me long after I left the *Godiva*. "Let us see vat else yu have."

There were a knife, fork, and spoon. My sister must have stolen these for me. Right at the bottom of the little house-maid's Mary Ann which served as my first sea-chest was a Bible. I threw that out with a curse, and at once got my ear banged by Andreas. Squashed flat beneath the Bible was a



nasty black and white mess, which I scraped up and recognized as the remains of a chocolate-cream mouse. I saw my small brother's hand in that—he must have contributed to my sea stores the one rare bit of luxury he had. It made me feel ashamed. . . . Yes, indeed, I was still a very small boy, and no man by the length of a long tow rope.

I discovered that Mickey's tale of a slop-chest was fiction. Store there was of tobacco, soft and hard, which the men could buy against their account of wages; but as for clothes, oilskins, boots, or dungarees, no. In later years I came to the conclusion that my first voyage to sea had been cleverly planned to sicken me. If so, the plan failed completely: it merely ensured that my first voyage was rather more wretched than first voyages need be.

At Andreas' insistence Chips made me a hammock out of barrel staves, which was slung between two stanchions in the fo'c'sle; but to the end of the voyage I had no other bedding than my Witney blanket. In bad weather I shivered without oilskins. When I would have thanked my stars that my brass cleaning would keep me out of the crashing seas shovelled up by the deep-laden little steamer, Mr Jones always found for me a job scrubbing gratings in the waist, where all that could be had of wet misery fell upon me.

There were bright spots nevertheless. Madeira, rising misty and blue out of a hot morning sea; strange voices of boatmen and strange foreign boats; the Azores, and pineapples and oranges to be had in exchange for any old shirt; Barbados, niggers, sugar-cane, and sharks. I traded my Jubilee mug in Barbados for a stuffed flying-fish and a shark's backbone, and drank for the remainder of the voyage out of a discarded tobacco-tin. Then the Essequibo and Demerara, the Berbice and mosquitoes; and two men carried to hospital with faces swollen like plum duffs from moonstroke. In Demerara Mickey Davron borrowed a silver pencil-case from me and gave it to a black coaling woman for favours received. I saw the woman, and felt that my pencil had been badly expended; but Mickey came on board afterwards with his cap at a rakish tilt and a satisfied glint in his roving eye.

I had no money to spend, and my shore jaunts were mere wanderings in blazing heat, for the men wanted none of my company. One day I was told off to help the messboy feed a gang of nigger stevedores at a table under the bridge-deck awnings. For an hour:

"Boy! Bring me some ice watah!"

"Boy! Give me dem hash!"

Put a beggar on horseback—give a black man a white waiter! But I ate a full meal of their left-overs.

Two sailing-ships of Nourse's Calcutta Line lay in the river ahead of us, and I hungrily watched their apprentices at work. They cleaned brass, as I did; but sometimes they worked aloft, and their young voices echoed over the water. When they went ashore they had pocket-money, and wore cap-badges and brass buttons. They had chums, and were clean. Our cargo had been partly coal, and the *Godiva* was in a filthy mess. I made up my mind then that I would carry on at sea, but I would go in sail by hook or by crook. If my father believed he could scare me by giving me this taste of the *Godiva*, he'd find how mistaken he was. I often wondered if the captain was in the plot; for one Sunday, when we were running back to Barbados, he stopped me outside the chart-room and gave me a big bunch of raisins. Beyond that he never seemed to notice me.

Mr Jones, the mate, was a bad Bluenose. Once he made me climb outside the bridge-rail, and stand on the shallow half-round to polish the builder's plate. He asked me some scarcely audible question, and when I asked him to repeat it he gave me a swinging thump on the head and knocked me from my precarious footing to the hatch ten feet below. Then he gave me another because in falling I spilt my oil on the deck.

I looked for Jones for many years after reaching manhood; but never met him again. He may count himself lucky.

Mr Clark was a kindly man. When he found out exactly how I stood in the ship, he often talked to me about the sea and took pains to teach me little things. What he showed me I never forgot. . . . Rest his old bones!

Tom Anderson, who licked me, was another good fellow. He made me a sailor's cap out of some old trousers, and exchanged at dinner times his lean meat, which he could not chew, for my fat, which I could not swallow.

I liked Tom.

I was a long way from being a sailor, however. There were no sailors needed in the *Godiva*. The jobs could nearly all be done by any landsman, and generally my own jobs were no worse than those given to the men; but a piece of sheer injustice finally sickened me of the *Godiva*. I had become inured to hardship, and could grin at it; but this was beyond a joke. The crew's latrine was simply a box in the head of the ship, with a pipe leading out through the side, which was flushed out every morning when the bosun washed down the decks. Even I knew enough to avoid stopping up that pipe. It was a fireman who used a wad of cotton waste one day, and until the next morning nothing could pass through the pipe. The bosun reported it to the mate, who, without inquiry, fastened upon me as the culprit. I protested, but to no effect.

"Put a bowline over, bosun, and send this good-for-nothing over to clear the pipe," said Mr Jones.

Argument was useless. Over the side I went, to sit precariously in a rope loop over the rolling trade-wind sea, my legs nearly torn off every time I was submerged; and that pipe, with all its nasty potentialities, at my head.

"Go on, God damn you! Stick your arm in and clear it!" roared Mr Jones. "Bosun, start the hose down it!"

I obeyed, the bosun obeyed, I found the waste, and ducked. But ducking was useless. Mr Jones laughed, but I wished I were within two stone of his size at that moment.

When we docked in London my mind was made up. I was paid off with twenty-five shillings, and the owner interested himself to the extent of ordering that I be permitted to remain on board and get my meals with the steward until the ship went to sea again. I had little to say to him, or he to me, but I detected him grinning over my head at the captain. He might grin. So would I—later.

Across the dock lay a great four-masted barque, the *K*——. Chips joined her the day that we paid off. Chips was a saving fellow, and rarely wasted time ashore. He advised me to go and see the mate of her.

"Yu can be a sailor in dot vun, Skimps," he said. "Yu vill be a boy, joost de same, but yu vill haf a proper bunk, and Ay vill teach yu to be a sailor. Yu go, Ay tell yu, ant Ay vill spik to ta mate for yu."

I asked Mr Clark's advice, for I had grown to like him well. Now he proved himself my friend.

"My boy," he said, "if you must be a bloody fool, it's better to be a bloody fool in a fine sailing-ship than in this steamer. Get Chips to take you and buy you some proper gear, then in the morning I'll take you aboard the barque and speak to the mate. I know him—he was a lad with me. And listen: you got drunk as a sow with that Davron swine when you joined this ship. You have better sense now, I hope. If you meet him again, buy him a big bottle of beer and hit him over the head with it. You'll make a sailor yet."

Next morning, without going home or even writing, I joined the big *K*——. A day later I sailed for Australia round the Cape.

## CHAPTER VI

### A REAL SAILOR

THE *K*— was a big ship, with a crew of thirty-seven hands. The captain's wife and small son were also on board, giving the ship a homely atmosphere. There was a donkey-engine for heavy hauling, and the ship, with all her new gear, worked heavily. The Board of Trade permitted the ship to go to sea with two A.B.s less than the complement for her tonnage on account of that donkey-engine, but before we were clear of the Channel it was discovered that no fuel had been put aboard for the boiler. That was a common trick, I heard, in the days of the first big steel ships; and though while the land was in sight the skipper issued rum after a hard job of work, as soon as we were off soundings the rum issue stopped.

We carried two live sheep and a tremendous old sow with a new litter of little piglets. My first job was cleaning out the pens, and though I comforted myself with thoughts of hot pork crackling, I never tasted fresh pork that voyage.

I was still the ship's boy.

The ship's company comprised Captain Hill, Mrs Hill, and Johnny, aged seven; Mr Trinder, mate, Mr Sutherland, second mate, Mr Wise, third mate; the steward, cook, bosun, Chips, Sails, Donkey, and Lamps; twelve apprentices, all cap-badged and brass-buttoned—while in port; ten A.B.s, two ordinary seamen, two boys—Street and myself. The captain's wages were twelve pounds a month and some bonus; the mate received eight pounds and his 'shakings'; the second mate six pounds and what he could scrounge out of the gear; the third mate got four pounds with no 'perks,' being only a senior apprentice not yet quite out of his time. He rated nothing beyond his pay except the privilege of doing two men's work. Apprentices, or their parents, had paid a pre-

mium of forty pounds, which was repaid to them in wages over four years. The steward received six pounds, and did a bit of clever work in catering. The cook—Doctor in all ships—earned five pounds and his ‘slush,’ which was all the grease he could hang on to from his cooking after the mate had scrounged what he needed for greasing the gear and Lamps had pinched what he could for his lamps. Lamps got a pound extra above seaman’s wages, which were two pounds ten a month. The donkeyman had five pounds, and when his donkey was not working he was expected to help Chips, doing blacksmithing. The bosun’s wages were four pounds a month, and Chips got ten shillings more. Street and I, the boys—and by far the most important people in the ship, judging by the jobs we were given to do—were paid the munificent wages of one pound a month; but of course we were *fed*, and *lodged*!

Anyhow, in the big ship I had a bunk to myself, even though it was a lower bunk next to the fo’c’sle door, where all the water that came on board entered. And I was used to horrible food, for in all my seagoing, in sail or steam, I never ate such appalling fodder as I had experienced in the *Godiva*.

As for gear, I now possessed a full kit of real sea stuff. Before sailing, Chips had lugged me by the arm up Ratcliff Highway, and there spent my twenty-five bob at bargain-price stalls, paying my tram-fare where necessary himself. When all was done, Chips took me to a pub where he sank a double-headed shot of rum, buying me a lemonade and standing over me while I drank it. He bought me a paper of fish and chips, and finally set me down to a ‘baby’s head’—a meat pie for fourpence—at the Sailors’ Home, while he paid a farewell visit to a lady friend. Thus it was decent old Chips who first guided my young inclinations into a clean channel without making me feel that I was being treated as less than human.

I still had to clean brasswork when we got to sea, but there was a vast difference between work here and work in the *Godiva*. In the steamer there was nothing but an iron hull, iron masts, iron decks, soot and cinders; no work for men

beyond washing decks, 'soojee-moojee,'<sup>1</sup> tarring anchors, and chipping rust. In the great windjammer there was similar work, but above was the stupendous fabric of masts and canvas, all of which required the knowledge of real seamen to keep in tune. There was the immense spread of the yards, the hum of wind in the rigging, and the soft sibilant voices of the running seas alongside. In the steamer the sea was for ever in torment, whacked and battered and bedevilled by the onrush of a clumsy hull driven by inexorable machinery. Going down the Trades, the *Godiva* could spread just three grimy sails, all black as the coal she carried, to assist the engines. Her canvas was as shapeless as a Drury Lane dresser. Here in the sailing-ship the sails were white, the sun painted them with shadows of mauve and ivory grey. When she burst a sea with her keen stem, it exploded in glittering jewels about her. She went with the wind, with the sea, part of both, a thing of pulsating life. As I rubbed away at my brasswork I could glance aloft at men and boys in the dizzy spaces, and look forward with beating heart to that day when I too might be up there with them.

Street and I were in different watches. We shared the jobs of cleaning pig and sheep pens, carrying the mess-kids to the fo'c'sle for the men's meals, and keeping the fo'c'sle clean. Whichever of us happened to have the morning watch, from 4 to 8 A.M., cleaned the poop brass; but there was always a young apprentice on the job as well—and his folks had paid forty pounds to secure him the privilege. The only difference between us was that the apprentice lived with his kind in the half-deck, which he and another youngster had to keep clean as Street and I had to keep the fo'c'sle. Apprentices had to carry their own mess-kids; each boy had to keep his own mess-gear in order as we did. There was little difference in the food, except that trifles of cabin scraps sometimes found their way to the half-deck.

For breakfast there was hash, wet or dry. If wet, it was a sort of stew, made of salt junk, potatoes, onions, and salt

<sup>1</sup> *Suji-muji* actually, but always spoken of as above by sailors. It is an Indian soap-powder—very strong—used on paintwork at sea.

water; if dry, it was made of salt meat, potatoes, onions, and slush, baked in a pan. When the potatoes were finished, there were compressed vegetables—a terrible parody on food which looked like cake tobacco when uncooked. There were unlimited biscuits, the bread barge being filled every morning. Each man and boy drew weekly, and had to guard as best he could, sixteen ounces of brown sugar, eight ounces of tinned butter, and eight ounces of marmalade. As the passage drew out to greater length, and anti-scorbutics were essential, sometimes a jar of pickles was sent forward to augment the daily whack of lime-juice. There was no salt, or pepper, or mustard, unless it was stolen while a man or boy helped the steward in the lazarette. Twice weekly every hand received a 'rootee,' or cob of soft bread. That was dubbed soft-tack, to distinguish it from hard-tack. On Sundays there was duff, which was merely a nasty lump of flour and grease boiled along with the salt meat. The apprentices' duff had a few currants in it—taken by the Doctor into the foretop, the boys vowed, and shot at the dough one by one.

Dinner consisted of salt pork and pea soup; salt beef and compressed vegetable soup; sometimes on Sundays the *menu* was varied, and we had tinned beef or tinned mutton, which went by the pleasant names of Fanny Adams, Harriet Lane, or Corpse. Once a week, usually on Friday, salt fish was issued, with rice. That fish had been embalmed and buried without prayer before the Ark went to sea. Jonah's whale tried some of it, rejected it, and went for Jonah. I always felt sorry for that whale. He was driven to it, and by no means a vicious brute.

For supper there was nothing but boiled tea and hard-tack, unless one saved something from dinner. Usually we saved a bit of meat, a drop of soup, and with biscuit pounded into flour with a marlinspike made it into cracker hash, dog's-body, or dandy-funk, which the Doctor could be bribed to bake if in a good temper. If there was a bit of marmalade to spare, it was smeared over the top of the dish, and then we ate luxuriously indeed. Furthermore, I acquired a keen nose for scraps, and having to feed the pigs with cabin swill, I



often picked many a tasty morsel from the bucket to flavour my supper. In a month I began to put flesh on my skinny frame.

One of the first voyage apprentices came from a village near Oxford, and we chummed up. He was nicknamed Pimple, and while he was not allowed in the fo'c'sle he often smuggled me into the half-deck for a chat when the older lads were out. It was good to have a chum from so near home, and we both derived much comfort from the things we had in common. Pimple was a parson's son, and had been to a good school at Thame: it was pleasant to hear him speak. The little fellow was a gentleman in every way, and I envied him. Queerly, he envied me when I told him about my Salvation Army experiences. He vowed it was far better to go ramping through the streets blowing a brass horn than to have to sit, book in hand, under the nose of the paternal parson. It's all a matter of viewpoint, doubtless.

We made a fast passage to the Line, but took fifty days to cross the meridian of the Cape. Then came the hard days of the Roaring Forties, and again I was impressed by the vast difference between sail and steam. The *Godiva* used to punch her blunt snout into the seas, fill her well-deck to the rails, and sluggishly roll herself free. She never gave an inch, never felt alive. She was like a solid body hurled against a liquid mountain; and when she thrust her nose down, her tail rose and her propeller raced so that she shook and rumbled like a small earthquake. Here in the big sailing-ship, with yards almost square, her double backstays enabling her to carry topgallant-sails and full foresail, we seemed to swim forward. Roll! She outrolled the steamer at times; plunge—she could do a spot of plunging too; but there was always a sense of buoyancy about her movements. She rarely dipped her bowsprit, though her head-gear kept up a swishing hum as she drove it through the seas. When she shipped water, she took it all along her length; the roaring, following seas seemed to gurgle and grin at her as they rose in a wall of green water above her topgallant-rail before crashing in thunder on to her long main-deck. Then it was "Watch yourselves!" We clung to the lifelines stretched fore and aft, or jumped for the

fife-rails and deckhouse ladders while the sea swept in a torrent over the hatches. At moments like those she seemed to be submerged altogether, only her houses, poop, and fo'c'sle head appearing, with the masts sticking up out of the water like the masts of a sunken wreck. But ever she shook herself free, quivered, and roared along. The seas were bitterly cold, the wind had a bite in it, yet after a couple of duckings the thrill of it sent a glow right through a fellow. In the *Godiva*, when a man got caught and soaked he ducked into the fo'c'sle to dry himself and sneak a smoke; in the sailing-ship a man simply re-tied his soul-and-body lashings, cursed the helmsman, and carried on.

Chips was as good as his word. He devoted many a dog-watch to teaching me bits of nautical cunning. He taught me how to know the ropes by a simple rule which straightened out the apparent chaos of a sailing-ship's gear. Briefly, and in general, the higher a rope led aloft, the farther aft was its belaying-pin. He showed me by means of a rough model that every squaresail had certain gear common to all, different in name only as the masts were different. I learnt that every one of the squaresails, except the upper topsails, had clew-lines; that all had sheets, buntlines, and braces; and that each jib and staysail was controlled by a halliard, a sheet, and a downhaul. Chips showed me the principle of furling a sail, so that what had appeared to me from the deck to be an involved and purposeless fumbling of a lot of men bent over a yard now took on a clear meaning. I watched apprentices go swarming aloft to furl the royals; now I wanted my chance to show them that brass buttons and gold badges did not alone make a sailor.

In the fo'c'sle I learnt other things, some excellent, others not so good. I learnt to scrub a floor, flattened on my belly under the lower bunks, and to see my work all undone by a sea pouring in through a carelessly hooked door. The sea showed me what I had missed: old socks, bits of hard-tack, dead matches or a dead rat, searched out and brought to light by the honest sea which knew no favourites. I learnt how to scour greasy mess-kids with teased rope-yarns and salt water,

to keep alight a lamp fed with salt-pork slush. I learnt to avoid as the devil broken-nosed Cardiff, who brought aboard a terrific disease which the bosun treated heroically with a razor—but neither disease nor treatment in the least quieted the beast in Cardiff. Street was found crying in the lamplocker one day, but could not be made to tell his trouble. Both Cardiff and Street were sent ashore to hospital when we reached Sydney, and Cardiff went from hospital to jail. We left Street in hospital.

I soon learnt to keep my rations—or ‘whack’—in the restricted space of my bunk without also making a hurrah’s nest of my bed. Old Peterson showed me the trick of making two blankets do the work of four by sewing newspapers between them. I had wondered at that old salt bringing so many newspapers to sea with him, for all through the warm weather I never saw him reading, but now that I knew the game I went aft and begged old papers from the third mate, who had plenty of blankets, but had saved his newspapers out of force of habit.

Peterson taught me to sew, and cut out for me a canvas Cunarder and pants from pieces of an old royal, which when I had sewn them fitted me at least as well as my Ratcliff Highway overalls. Worn under my oilskins, the canvas suit was a fine wind-breaker, and saved me many a shivery night-watch down in the lower Forties.

Once a week, on fine days, the fo’c’sle held a field day, when everybody turned out his bag or chest and aired and mended his gear. Peterson made me shake out everything I possessed, and wipe off the mildew from the paper lining of my box before stowing it again. At the bottom of the box, on the first field day, I again found the Bible which had earned me a boxed ear from pious Andreas; it was stuck together with mildew, altogether an unpleasant, stinking mess of leather and glue and sodden paper. I pitched it out again, but Peterson retrieved it and I ducked to avoid the swipe I instinctively expected. Andreas had told me it was blasphemy to mishandle the good book, but to me it was nothing more than a mess of mildew, an unasked, unwanted

bit of dunnage. I feared that Peterson shared the views of Andreas, but he simply remarked as he picked it up :

‘Nefer t’row away paper, Skimps. Soon ve got no matches.’

On the day when the strong westerlies moderated, and the skies turned from grey to blue, the sun from a pallid yellow to gold, Mr Trinder seized me by the ear, but without hurt.

“Boy, can you loose a royal?” he asked. Mr Trinder rarely spoke to me, but Chips told me he was watching me all the time, remembering Mr Clark’s recommendation.

“Yes, sir!” I answered eagerly, my heart thumping hard with excitement.

“Then up you go. Take the fore, and don’t let go with both hands at once. I don’t want a mess on my deck.”

An apprentice was already half-way up to the main-royal, and Pimple was making his first essay on the mizzen. It was a true ‘boys’ day, after three weeks of fierce weather that had reduced even the toughest seaman to but barely a man. The going was easy as far as the topgallant spreaders, and I went aloft like a monkey; but then I looked down, and my stomach turned over. I saw what every sailor has seen on his first venture among the ‘branches’—I saw the ship’s lean length, diminished by distance to the apparent size of a knife-handle, surrounded by gleaming foam, swinging from side to side as if a giant hand above her had taken her by the mastheads and was shaking her like a playful pendulum. My stomach told me that it was the mastheads that swung, and not the ship, but it looked the other way about.

For a moment I shut my eyes tight and clung with both hands, flattening my body against the rigging and swallowing hard. Then I remembered Chips’ advice, opened my eyes and kept them upon my objective, and my stomach became easy again. When my feet were securely on the footrope, and my belly pressed against the yard, I felt better, and dared to glance about me while tugging at the gasket. The main royal already hung in its gear, the lad was standing clear, handing the buntline ready for overhauling. Pimple was

taking off the turns of his gasket, too. I peered below at the tiny figures on deck. There was Chips, on the fo'c'sle head, glancing up at me critically; there was the mate, looking, I felt sure, with admiration upon my fine work.

"Fore-royal, there! What the hell's keeping you?" That was the mate's voice. I frantically called up all that Chips had taught me, and began to make up my gasket. Pimple had finished, and was getting off the yard when with a desperate rush I caught up with him.

"Sheet home, fore-royal!" I yelled downward.

"Sheet home, mizzen-royal!" howled Pimple like an echo.

"Stand clear!" the mate shouted back, and the hands on deck hauled home the sheets. I was thrilled, for I had done as well as brassbound Pimple.

"Land ho! Land on the port bow, sir!" screamed Pimple at the moment, and all my elation died. Pimple had sighted King Island, and I, who had been a voyage to sea before he saw a ship, had missed that golden privilege. I stared at the misty speck. Australia!

"Fore-royal! What's holding that bloody buntline?"

That was the mate again. I cleared the sheave of a frayed yarn and climbed down to the deck and realities.

## CHAPTER VII

### SWEET DAYS AND BITTER

**I**N Sydney Pimple lent me half-a-crown, and a cap with a badge, and we went ashore. I was bigger than Pimple; and though I wore with my jaunty 'prentice cap nothing more than a well-scrubbed suit of dungarees and a pair of self-made canvas shoes with rope-soles, I chucked as big a chest as he.

Dear old Pimple! He was never cut out for the hard life of the sea. Though he learnt quickly, had all the courage going, and never in my experience lost his temper, he should really have been a parson. When I think of the utter little devils with me in St Mary's choir, then think of Pimple, I wonder. Pimple hated his family life as intensely as I had hated mine, and for much the same reasons, though we were bred and reared in circumstances as different as possible. Had he not been fed up on religion as a boy, Pimple might have done heroic work as padre of some poor parish; and had I not been dosed with God, as a horse is dosed with medicine, I might never have made much of a parish parson, but I'd have made a damned good missionary, teaching the creed of Self-help to niggers instead of "God will Provide," which in my experience has never done more than inculcate the faith of the Itching Palm.

But we are ashore in Sydney.

Pimple and I strolled along George Street to the Post Office, where we sent off our home letters. Pimple despatched a bundle as thick as his arm; my mail was a single letter to my sister. Then we sought excitement, and found it.

Sydney in sailing-ship days was a glorious city for an English boy to drop into. The life was so bubbling, the people so alive, the shops so full of cheap things for a boy's stomach, that we soon began counting our money. While we were

flattening our noses against a restaurant window in which we could read *menus* offering for sixpence a full meal of meat, vegetables, bread, butter, fruit, and milk, a large lad wearing the cap-badge of the Aberdeen White Star Line hove-to alongside.

"Greenhorns, aren't you?" he asked civilly.

"My first voyage," Pimple answered, adding graciously: "Skimps has been to sea before, though."

"I was never in Sydney," I chirped, leaving the other lad to give me credit for whatever experience he liked.

"I'm bound for Paddy's Market. Want to come?" our new chum invited. "My name's Foote. I'm in the *Miltiades*."

"What's in Paddy's Market?" Pimple inquired politely. We had not come ashore to fool around markets.

"You *are* green!" grinned Foote. "It's Friday. Come on and see some sport. Let's have a drink first, though. Can't stand this climate unless you take a little sheoke."

"Thanks, I don't drink," said Pimple, and I added, loyally backing up Pimple: "I don't care for one now, thanks."

Foote laughed indulgently.

"Nice boys! Wait for me, then. Shan't be long."

We turned into King Street and our new chum dived down some steps into what seemed to be a glorified cellar. When he came out licking his lips his grin spread all over his broad face.

"Go there if you ever feel like a drink," he said. "Lots of these wine-cellars about, but this is about the best. Five topping barmaids here. Any one of them will take you home for a quid."

We strolled along. There were few tramcars then. Only one cable-car track was in operation; chiefly the traffic was carried on by steam-cars—engine and two coaches, running on open rails—a regular locomotive train in mid-street. We ran across the road in front of one.

"She'll give you breakfast, too," remarked Foote, still thinking about that wine-cellar.

Paddy's Market was in full roar when we got there. We three lads stuck close to each other, wandering without

apparent aim amongst the noise. Pimple and I wanted to keep stopping, fascinated by the confusion; but we were dragged along until we came to a great pen of miserable shorn sheep. The poor beasts looked bewildered, as well they might, coming down to this after a lifetime on the open run. Nobody seemed to be interested in them, except some more ship's boys like ourselves.

"After they shear 'em, they don't want the sheep," Foote explained. "Mutton's cheaper than dirt here. They're trying out some gadget for freezing carcasses, and they'll be worth something if that comes off. Now's *our* time. How much cash have you got, cherubs?"

We announced our financial strength; and before we quite realized it the three of us possessed a live sheep apiece, bought at a shilling a head. Foote was hopping with excitement, and ownership gave me a mild thrill too; but what we were to do with the brutes now we owned them was a mystery.

"Come on!" chirruped our leader.

The other sailing-ship lads had bought sheep as well, and the market folks seemed quite familiar with the joke. Men and women darted aside as half a dozen frightened sheep surged in among them, driven by as many wild young ruffians. There surely were never people so tolerant as the Australians where English sailing-ship boys were concerned. Even Pimple entered into the fun. We herded our muttons, and drove them into the street, chivvying them right among the traffic. I lost mine first, and never knew where it went. Then I helped to drive the others and Sydney looked on, laughing at the silly sport.

Pimple lost his sheep next, and two more broke away and took the road to Paddington, their owners in full cry after them. Pimple and I stuck to Foote, and drove his animal as far as the Quay, where it sprang over the side. We arrived, panting, abreast of a small vessel manned by Chinamen.

"Hey, John, you see one piecee sheep?" we yelled.

"I see. One piecee sheep go ove'bo'd, I think," answered a bland yellow man. "I think he ddown."

Three Chinamen helped us scan the waters.



"Too bad," said one of them at last.

We gave up the search, but I have doubts about the destiny of that sheep. Mutton and lice velly good, I think!

"We'll get some more next Friday," said Foote the philosopher. "Come and have a drink now. You've earned one."

Again we declined—Pimple being the guiding influence in my case. We sought one of those amazing restaurants instead, and ate all we could hold for sixpence. When we strolled aboard in the evening, my half-crown was spent, and Pimple gave me a hint.

"You're on wages, Skimps. You should ask the Old Man for an advance. Ask for a quid, you'll get ten bob, and tell him you want to buy a parrot."

Pimple had profited by his passage out in the half-deck.

I approached the captain next morning, when I knew that Mrs Hill would be with him. She, dear soul, loved all the boys like a mother, and Captain Hill hated to be asked a favour in her presence, for he could never quite carry out a blank refusal.

"A pound?" he snapped at me. "What for?"

"I want to buy a parrot, sir," said I.

"Parrot! Who's been putting you up to this?"

"I promised to take one home for my sister, sir."

"Let the boy have his parrot, my dear," urged Mrs Hill. "I'm sure it's better than spending money in some other ways."

"You bring that parrot to me, boy, don't forget," the Old Man said significantly, pushing a golden half-sovereign across the table to me.

I went ashore alone that evening, for Pimple had letters to some relatives and had got the day off. I wandered about feeling lonely, full of cash, but undecided how to spend it. Of course I wanted no parrot; I had already made up the yarn I'd tell the captain. Parrots can fly, and I can't.

While I was gazing into the windows of Hordern's big store, I was aware of a girl standing beside me. Until I caught her reflection in the plate-glass I was afraid to turn to

look at her, a bit ashamed of my dungarees. But they were clean, and I wore Pimple's cheesecutter cap, so persuaded myself that I looked at least as well as most apprentices ashore. So I turned, and she smiled at me.

She was the prettiest girl I had ever seen, or for that matter ever saw: about fifteen, with great brown eyes, long glossy brown hair, and a face as sweet as an Australian peach; dressed in some gauzy stuff which showed off her trim shape and revealed legs such as I thought grew only on music-hall actresses.

"Hullo," I grinned.

"Hullo," she smiled. "You're an English boy, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm off the big four-masted barque over at Dawe's Point. Come for a walk?"

"What's your name?"

"Ski—I mean Teddy," I foozled.

"Mine's Agnes McAlpine. I like Teddy," she said kindly. "Where shall we go?"

"You say. I'm a stranger here," I said.

We took the Manly boat at Circular Quay, and from a snug corner watched the grand panorama of Sydney Harbour slip past. Agnes was very sweet, a comfortable chum, warm and soft, and we sat very close together. But she was not the sort of girl I took her for at first; I found that out among the sand-dunes of Manly. I bought her sweets, and we stayed on the glorious beach until it was time to catch the last boat. When we landed at Circular Quay again she told me she lived out in Surrey Hills, and I must come up to her father's house on the morrow.

"Yes, and get kicked out!" I protested, not accustomed to true Australian hospitality.

"Don't be silly," she laughed. "I'll bring Dad to your ship to-morrow, you see."

She kissed me good-night, and I went aboard in a twitter. Next morning I dodged the Old Man until he went ashore, putting off the trial of my parrot yarn. That morning I made a terrible fist of my work, and got thumped twice by the third

mate. In the end Mr Trinder told me I'd have no more shore leave for a week, and for a moment I listed him with Mr Jones of the *Godiva*.

Then, wonder of wonders! True to her promise, Agnes tripped aboard looking like a very lively angel, accompanied by a good-natured looking gentleman dressed in stylish flannels. I hid in the fo'c'sle, ashamed of my working grime, and my heart was churning madly. Mr Trinder had stopped my shore leave, but I knew that if Agnes once got properly to work on him no mate afloat could refuse me any privilege. I hurried into my best clothes and peeped out along the main-deck.

I saw the visitors leaving and Agnes was weeping; as soon as they were off the gangway Pimple came to find me, and from him I heard the bad news. Agnes' father had been very willing indeed to show hospitality to a respectable indentured apprentice, but deck-boys were scarcely the same thing. Here, for me, ended a sweet dream, for I never saw Agnes again. I have never forgotten her; and I hope she reads this book.

I had still to explain about that parrot. Somehow I did not like the look in the skipper's blue eye when he sent for me; and this time my protectress was absent, for Mrs Hill had taken her son ashore to stay with friends while the unpleasantness of unloading lasted.

"Where's your parrot?" the Old Man growled.

"It flew away, sir," I gulped.

"Flew away! Where?"

"It flew aboard a Chinese ship, sir. They stole it," I swiftly fabricated.

"I think I know that Chinese ship, boy," said the Old Man with a knowing look at me. "You come along with me. We'll makee look-see."

Shivering in dread I followed him. At every turn of the quays my apprehension increased. Then we arrived at the spot where that Chinese ship had been lying when our sheep took a header, and the berth was empty.

"She's gone, sir," I bleated. "She was lying right here."

"H'm!" grunted Captain Hill, turning away from me to

glare across the harbour. There was little more he could say; but I got no more money out of him in Sydney. Pimple lent me a shilling now and then, but Pimple's pocket-money was strictly limited. I spent a lot of time afterwards on the Domain, where the scenery is grand and the ozone free.

We lay in Sydney for six weeks, swinging to an anchor for a month in Mosman's Bay; then hauled over to the Dockyard to load scrap-iron for China.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A YEAR OR TWO

THE life on a sailing-ship did me a lot of good. The grub was terrible, the work terrific, the sleeping quarters not quite as good as Uncle Ted gave his prize hogs; but together they built a covering upon my skinny frame, my hull and spars were growing sturdy.

Altogether there were fourteen boys in the big ship after Street left, and, counting in Johnny Hill, of ages ranging from eight to nineteen years. The nineteeners would resent being called boys, for they could smoke, spit, and swear with men; but as boys they rated aboard the ship. Mrs Hill had to mother a litter of obstreperous pups, and gallantly she did it. Her sharp eyes picked out torn clothes, holed socks, missing buttons, and dirty necks, and most boys found the problem of keeping themselves clean and washing clothes on two quarts of water a day most troublesome. I know that I did. Mrs Hill played no favourites. Premium apprentices were to her no better than ship's boys; she watched over us all. In Sydney she often made a cake for the half-deck, and always ordered that a good lump was to be sent along to me. Sometimes I managed to keep it, sometimes my prize was forcibly apportioned out among stronger hands.

After Street went to hospital I was the only boy left in the fo'c'sle, and I believe Mrs Hill took that into account. Not that the men were worse than ordinary; they were a decent lot after Cardiff had gone; but Mrs Hill must have been giving me more than my reasonable share of thought. Just before we sailed for China one of the older apprentices ran away, and Captain Hill, at his agent's request, shipped two young Colonials at a shilling a month to give them the thrill of a voyage in a windjammer. Therefore we had a bunk too few in the fo'c'sle and one to spare in the half-deck. On the

morning that we towed out the mate told me to take my gear into the half-deck and berth there in future. That was the nearest I ever got to being a brassboulder. I struck a swagger that day, and the third mate told me I'd make a man yet if I didn't grow into an old soldier before I had become a young sailor.

On the China passage I learned to furl a royal alone, and to take a trick at the wheel in fine weather. A seaman named Defries taught me to make a ship in a bottle, and I became the best dog's-body maker in the half-deck. I was rapidly growing up. Pimple lent me his navigation books, and I began to study, heedless of the comments of older lads who never meant to look in a book until they went to swotting school after finishing their time. Having no prospect of being able to attend a school, I read avidly, and found navigation a fascinating and easy study.

If this were to be merely a record of my seafaring days, I might ramble along to the end of the book; and if it were possible to maintain a strict chronological sequence the time spent in certain ships might be given truer proportion; but when I lost my schooner yacht in the Bahamas hurricane of 1928 I lost everything I possessed, papers and logs included, and I must perforce make a mains'l haul of much that happened, sticking in the highlights as my memory serves. Of yarns describing the way of a sailing-ship at sea there are plenty; details of ports abound; there are as many books of shanties as there are songs. My yarn is of none of these alone, but each will be noted in its proper place.

Our scrap-iron was going to Shanghai. As we neared the coast the ship was painted up to astonish the natives. I never before realized how many miles of spidery wire rigging were necessary to hold a big ship's tall masts upright; nor did I know the abominable qualities of Stockholm tar until I had swung aloft in a bosun's chair day after blazing day with a tarpot and a wad of oakum, tarring down the loftier stays. Blisters were a commonplace—great blisters raised by the sun from tar spots on my face and arms. Spots that fell upon the scoured deck and glossy white paint were dealt with afterwards,

under the mate's hawk eye in my watch below. The job had its compensations, however. Beneath me, looking no bigger than rabbits, men chipped at stanchions and bulwarks, scraping off the rust, red-leading the smooth steel in readiness for the coats of colour.

The bosun was a busy man, a Finn from Hangö, silent and capable. He had made for himself a fine pair of boots out of a sheepskin, with carved wooden soles an inch thick which were fastened to the uppers with brass nails as big as carpet tacks. He was proud of his handiwork, as he had reason to be. And he was as busy as a bedbug that day, filling paint-pots, finding brushes, sharpening scrapers, all to save the time of the men. Mr Trinder thought a lot of him.

Able Seaman Leach was a Cockney, a fine seaman. After dinner that day, when the boys had been hoisted to their giddy spaces and the men returned to their work, Leach took on the job left by the man who had gone to the wheel. From my perch midway down the mizzen-royal stay I heard sharp words below. At first they sounded musical at that height, but I soon detected the note of discord, and perilously leaned from my board to look down. Leach was shaking a worn-out red-lead brush in the bosun's face, shouting his opinion of it as a tool for a seaman. He likened it to the bosun's whiskers. The bosun quietly insisted that it was good enough for a man who knew his work, that it had been good enough for a better man than Leach.

Leach suddenly jabbed the stubby brush into the bosun's eye, and the Finn stood still, looking mildly surprised. Then Leach flung down the brush, and the red end landed upon one of those beautiful boots. There was no work done aboard that ship for five red minutes, for the Finn went stark raving mad. He gathered Leach to his bosom, butted him with his skull, kneed him and punched him; but as soon as Leach could get his breath he set about the Finn in proper Poplar fashion. It was a splendid scrap, one up, one down, and plenty of blood. At last the Finn secured a wrestling hold and flung Leach into the waterways, leaping after him and kicking away at his face and head with his brass-nailed wooden soles.

Mrs Hill chose that moment to appear on deck with her sewing, and the mate suddenly seemed to be aware that something was going on that shouldn't.

"Carry on, you men! What the—— What are you loafing for?" he yelled, and the work was resumed as if nothing had happened.

All hands thought at that moment that a woman had no right aboard a ship.

In Shanghai we looked for a resumption of hostilities, for the belligerents had been breathing fire and slaughter. But at the first pub they made it up, in good sailor style. Leach invited the bosun to have a drink, and the Finn graciously accepted.

"Ay will haf brandy an' soda, t'enks," he murmured.

Leach stared at him. The other men, including myself, had ordered beer.

"Bli'me, a shilling drink!" gasped Leach. Snatching up the brandy glass he hove it into the Finn's face, and then there *was* a fight.

It ended with a wrecked bar, and two decent sailormen were hauled off to jail. Captain Hill got them out, for he liked his bosun, but Leach never came back to the ship. He joined a dirty China coaster, where nobody wore boots, and where the only paintwork that was ever done was done by the soot from the funnel.

Shanghai bewildered me. The teeming life, the smells and machine-gun chatter of the Chinese city were too involved in each other to be properly separated. I ate *lichee* nuts, and drank weak tea that had no kick after the bitter brew of the ship. While we lay out at anchor, the Old Man told me off as his boat boy, and in my sculling passages to and fro across the river I became fascinated by the *sampan* dwellers—the lean men, the placid women, the fat babies, and the tethered fowls. Used as I was to the free-and-easy ways of men in their deep-sea toilet operations, some of the *sampan* women embarrassed me with their unblinking candour.

I brought away from Shanghai an impression of a vast ant-heap, always busy, always moving somewhere, irresistibly, to some unfathomable end—no more to be turned aside than ants



by a cockroach—pouring over the cockroach if in their way, eating it if necessary, but moving on in the end without noticeable check.

Our scrap-iron discharged, we went up to Moji, where we loaded coal for San Francisco.

Japanese coal is dirty stuff. We ate it in our food for weeks. The cargo had been badly trimmed, too, and the ship behaved awkwardly. She rooted with her nose, and shovelled up heavy water over her quarter. After three weeks on one tack in a fresh breeze she developed a bad list, and we had to go into the hold to try to trim her, and it was a new experience.

All available hands were on the job. One boy at a time carried oatmeal-water to the men for an hour, then an exhausted young trimmer relieved him to take his turn with a shovel. Stifling, sweating, slipping in the shifting coal, banging heads against beams and frames, we laboured away at the beastly job. For a while some brave hearts tried to sing, but song soon died away and sullen cursing ruled. The captain came down on the second day to inspect the work, and when he saw men using a naked light he almost slipped his cable. From then onward we had no light, for we had long since worked away from the hatches. In four days the ship was trimmed, and at once she seemed to feel the change.

The Old Man was very good about it, and when the men had cleaned themselves and washed the ship down he sent forward two kettles of rum. We had a sing-song on the strength of it. When it was quite dark, Pimple and I slipped forward to listen. Shanties we had heard—the working songs of sailors—but now we heard the songs which were not shanties, and some of them were corks.

Good morning, Mister Fisherman, good morning, sir, sez he,  
Hey, hi, folderiddle-day.

Good morning, Mister Fisherman, good morning, sir, sez he,  
Have you any little crabfish to sell unto me?

Singing folderiddle-hi-do, folderiddle-day!

This choice ditty told the story of a fisherman who had nowhere to put his fish, so used an intimate article of bedroom furniture—to the sad grief of Mrs Fisherman.

Then there was the song about the wives of various members of the ship's afterguard and petty officers.

The first that came was the Chief Mate's wife, and she was dressed in red . . .

Some were dressed in black, in green, in all manner of colours, and each lady had stowed away somewhere some article of the ship's equipment, the deep-sea lead, the log-reel, and so forth, and as the song went on their capacity was amazing.

The bosun sang a really fine ditty, a decided relief to the increasingly ribald offerings that burst forth as the rum sank in the kettles. It had a haunting melody, and in the bosun's clear, high voice, to the running accompaniment of the seas slipping along the ship's side, it sounded like real music.

Ay been a wilt rofer for many a year,  
Ant Ay spent all my money on wimmen ant beer;  
So now Ay am hart up, ant all on ta rocks,  
Ant Ay got no tobacco in my olt bacca box.  
Singing nay, no, nefer, nefer no more,  
Will Ay play ta wilt rofer, no, nefer no more.

The two young Australians, the bob-a-month men, had been to an English public school, and to Melbourne University. One of them, Pat Robbie, knew a maternal great-uncle of mine who had been a porter or something similar at the University; so we had something on which to strike up an acquaintance. Pat and Church, his chum, blossomed out as the sing-song progressed, and sang foul student ditties which out-dirtied the sea songs. Church spun a couple of yarns, too, which made even old Peterson grunt. I envied those lads their opportunities, but after all I considered that a bawdy story sounded a bit more in keeping with common language than when told with a 'Varsity accent. The rum may have been responsible. I have since heard many a bawdy tale told by Oxford undergrads in Ike Luker's parlour in Holywell, yet somehow they sounded out of place coming from such people. Perhaps my lack of appreciation was due to my lack of education.

The day following the sing-song broke hard and brassy, and in the forenoon watch the royals and flying jib were taken in.

Captain Hill kept the deck all the forenoon, and Mrs Hill's awning came down before noon. The sun was small, metallic, like a yellow coin plastered against a dull metal plate. The wind freshened; it was not yet really weighty, but every now and then a puff came from somewhere which brought the brine bubbling in through the scuppers and set the gear thrumming. In the afternoon all staysails came in, and the mizzen course was hauled up. By the second dog-watch the sea had turned to a cold grey, with whipping whitecaps and ominous weight; while at four bells the ship reeled to a squall, and the rumble of shifting coal could be heard below.

"We'll put her round, mister," the Old Man said to the mate, "then you can take everything off her except the top-sails and foresail. The glass falls as if the tube were broken."

We got her on the other tack, but she had taken so heavy a list that even with a gale blowing hard on her listed side she only barely stood upright. It put a terrific strain on the gear and the Old Man watched her anxiously, as we all did.

"Gott help her ven she catches a snorter ant she's flyin' light!" grumbled Chips, securing the hatches afresh.

For two days I saw such weather as I had only heard about. I had believed those yarns to be the leg-pulling of old salts. The ship was new; she was only under charter to the man who operated her, and I believe she had been built in Russia. The way she behaved in that breeze was a caution to old seamen. She would go over before a sharp squall until the waterways were a chaos of broken water and the main-deck a snarling trap of gear washed from the pins; then she would check, seem to have found her heeling limit, and, when men let go their hold on the lifelines to make for more solid security, over she would go again with a sickening jerk and put her topgallant-rail two feet under green water. What was wrong with her design I don't know. She came out of that gale, three days of it, without losing a rope-yarn; but there was not a man aboard her but felt in his bones that one day she would take a puff that would drive her beyond her erratic limit and roll her finally over.

In San Francisco the Old Man wanted to send his wife and

boy home. The ship was on tramping charter and might be away from home for years; but Mrs Hill refused to quit her husband. Most of the crew, however, disappeared, including seven of the apprentices. The two Australians left and went home by the steamer *Aorangi*. They were not scared—I never met lads with more bowels—but they had experienced the joys of windjamming and their real life awaited them. They were wise.

We lay three months in 'Frisco before we received orders to go up to Puget Sound to load heavy timber for Melbourne. To me the orders simply meant visiting two new ports; the ship could not very well sink stowed full of wood.

In all the ports I had yet visited I received no letter from home. Not that I cared much, except that I always wrote to my sister, and resented her failure to respond. There was a lot about life that puzzled me about this time. It wasn't such a cushy life that a fellow could afford to miss anything good.

In Puget Sound a parson sort of chap came on board and asked permission from the Old Man to give the hands a little talk. He talked no end, all about the wickedness of men and the precariousness of a sailor's life, winding up with a thundering peroration about the Wrath to come. By his showing, if a man drank a hooker of rum, smoked plug tobacco, swore, told smutty stories, or enjoyed a little feminine society at a price, that man was bound hell-bent for a horrible place compared with which trimming Jap coal in a cranky windjammer was Paradise.

When the holy man had finished, and started dishing out tracts, old Peterson filled his cutty clay with plug mixed with the stale dottle, used the tract to light it, and remarked between puffs: "Ve vork hart, ve live hart, mostly ve die hart, ant to go to hell after all's no sort of preaching. Dot's guff, mister, ant so Ay tell yu."

I heard the same thought put into different words afterwards, but old Peterson was the first man I ever heard utter it, and it seemed very apt to me.

We took four months crossing to Melbourne, for the ship sailed like a raft in the light winds encountered; but she gave

us no heart failure, for we never set a royal, the Old Man having apparently quite made up his mind regarding her real quality.

"More days, more dollars," the men said. The older apprentices didn't mind, for they began to see themselves out of their time without having to make another voyage.

When in Melbourne, our timber discharged, we saw the last of the wool and grain ships leave for home, and we still lacked a charter. Our voyage promised to stretch well into two years. Even I saw good in that. Although I earned only one pound a month, I would land home with a pay-off of more money than I had ever dreamt of possessing. Furthermore, I knew that I was keeping in Mr Trinder's good graces, and with luck I might expect to sign on as ordinary seaman next voyage.

After lying for nearly four months in the Yarra river Captain Hill came on board one day looking grim. Again he tried to persuade Mrs Hill to take steamer for home, and again he failed to budge her. She bought school-books and commenced to give the boy lessons. That week, however, things moved and Pimple brought the buzz to us in the half-deck.

"We're going to Belize in ballast," he announced. "There's a boom in dyestuffs at home, and logwood freights are up."

## CHAPTER IX

### OVER SHE GOES!

IT was good that the prevailing winds ruled fair, if strong, over that route round the Horn. We skipped along under very small sail for such a vessel, rolling dizzily, and whenever the wind hauled or backed, necessitating the bracing up of the yards, we watched the wake sliding away to windward. But as the weather grew cold, and we made our southing on the great circle, we appreciated the cautious sail spread and put up with the rolling. Every time an icicle crashed down from above we glowed to think that, short of meeting a downright Cape Stiff sneezer, there could be little unpleasant work up aloft.

On the day when we reached our most southerly latitude ice appeared. It was fun, at first, to hear the tinkle of hard ice against the steel sides; once or twice we caught sight of heavier masses of ice which might have made more than a tinkle had we struck them. Next day the ice stretched as far as the eye could see, and then look-outs were posted aloft to watch for bergs.

The glare on the ice bothered me. After a spell of look-out I found my eyes hurting me; and after a week of it, when the only open water we had seen was what the ship left astern of her, I suddenly found myself unable to see anything but dead white. Somebody grabbed me as I was stumbling about, and took me aft to the Old Man, who, after poking and pulling at my eyes, muttered something which I did not catch and shoved me over to Mrs Hill, with an order spoken in such a tone that it scared me.

"Poor boy!" murmured the good lady, and led me to her own room.

For many days she kept me on the saloon settee, bathing and fomenting my eyes, which remained bandaged between treatments. When at last the bandages were discarded, and I

could at least distinguish between light and darkness, I returned to my duty. The ice had vanished by that time, and the ship wallowed along before a growing gale. Captain Hill and the mate discussed me for a long time, and then I was given a soft job helping the lamptrimmer for a few days.

"Young 'un," said Mr Trinder, kindly, "if I were you I'd go home to that rope-shop you told me about. It's a pity, for you're not the worst boy I've had. But your eyes are dud; you'll never get your ticket, and you don't want to spend the rest of your life in fo'c'sles. You'll waste your time at sea."

That gave me to think. I neither wanted nor meant to live my lifetime in fo'c'sles, nor did I think there was any reason why I should. I could see now almost as well as ever, and, boylike, I scorned the mate's well-meant advice.

Soon came Cape Horn, and the great thrill. So badly had the big ship steered that we sighted Old Stiff well out on the star-board bow, and had to haul to the south'ard to double it. We passed so closely that I made a rough sketch of the notorious headland. The sun shone in a blue sky as bright as that of an English summer; the seas rolled along with us showing scarcely a broken crest; but we could see the surges climbing half-way up the black cliffs, and hear the thunder of their fall. The sprays shot high over the crags that created them, and one could fancy one saw in those glittering mists the wraiths of all the splendid ships done to death about that cape. We boys gazed in fascination, chattering away like monkeys.

"Mr Sutherland," snapped the Old Man, "can't you find work for those damned boys? Make 'em stow their infernal chatter!"

We were found some wholly unnecessary job which kept us down off the rail, and growled because we could no longer watch the picture.

"You donkeys!" said the oldest apprentice, who had doubled Cape Stiff twice before. "Don't you know a lee shore when you see it?"

We shut up, then, for of course every man or boy who ever went to sea learnt about lee shores very quickly. We understood all that the dreaded term could imply, but in our youthful

excitement we had not realized that a fair wind may be turned into a foul one when a ship's course is altered. Sneaking brief glances out through a lee-side washport, we continued to regard Cape Stiff with a new interest.

That thunder, those jewels of spray—no, they were not as beautiful as they looked. Anxiously we noted the slowly changing bearing of the land, and now it was easy to understand why the Old Man stood motionless at the poop-rail, his hands gripping the teak until the knuckles shone dead white; his face set and grim, his eyes never leaving the surf until the black loom of the rock slid abaft the 'thwartship line of the rail. Then he called out quietly for the yards to be checked a trifle, and the ship's head swung a point or two northward, while our wake ran truer as she was eased off the wind.

Lady Luck sailed with the unlucky *K*—— that day.

Light winds carried us steadily north, and even the Doldrums proved kind. Except for that bit of jamming up off the Horn we never had the yards on the backstays. Off the Plate, on a day of torrential rains and heavy thunderstorms, a lovely little clipper came foaming up astern of us and made her number. She overhauled us as if we were aground, and between squalls the sun touched her with magic—green, white, and gold.

"That's the *Pericles*," Mr Wise told us. "Fifty days out of 'Frisco. Lord! Look at her go."

Every time a squall struck the green flier her royals fluttered down; the moment the squall passed, up they went again. She went buzzing by us at two knots to our one, and we gave her a shout. Somebody on her poop waved a nonchalant hand at us, then she was gone. She vanished into the heart of a squall as black as Erebus; and when that squall cleared we saw a gleam of white on the horizon just before she slipped over the rim of the world.

"Lucky stiffs!" said Pimple; and Pimple must have had the gift of prophecy.

We rolled past San Roque and picked up the Equatorial Current, which carried us swimmingly along until the Gulf of Honduras lay not far ahead. The men we had shipped in San



Francisco to replace deserters had jumped in Melbourne, where most of our remaining Londoners deserted too, for there were gold finds up-country, and even labourers in Victoria and New South Wales could earn a pound a day. The men who shipped for the passage to Belize were disillusioned gold chasers or plain Wallaby stiffs. Of our original crew but one-third remained, the captain and mates, four apprentices, Chips, bosun, and myself among them. Pimple told me that he had heard in Melbourne a rumour concerning the ship and the position of her indentured apprentices, which worried him. The ship belonging to no regular line, apprentices had been taken by the captain himself ; and if the present operator of the ship ceased running her, the boys had no sound outlook such as boys of the Aberdeen White Star, Corrie's, or Devitt and Moore had. Pimple confided in me that he meant to quit at the end of this voyage, and if his father refused to place him in a more solidly established firm, he would try his best to settle down in a shore berth. The little chap had played the game like a man, but he obviously did not belong to the sea.

I never knew Pimple laugh at a dirty yarn, or add bits to a shanty in the fashion of the half-deck. He had a Bible, and, what's more, read it ; he even tried, without offensiveness, to persuade me that I might find comfort in the Old Book. But I had dipped into the Book while a choirboy, and knew something about it ; when I showed him a lot of very ripe bits in it and asked him about the comfort to be derived from them, he smiled in his quaint way and said I must wink at such parts and get my solace from the nicer parts—which was precisely what parsons told me later on. But I could not see it in that light. To me, the Book was either divinely inspired, therefore to be accepted to the last word, or merely a collection of rather bloody and incredible folk-tales to be no more taken seriously than *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*. I could see no difference between David and Solomon and any other notorious old libertines who adopted pious habits when their sexual spate had dwindled to a trickle. When Pimple told me that in spite of his hatred of the enforced religion of his childhood he still said his prayers and found that they helped him, I roughly retorted that

## OVER SHE GOES!

in my opinion it would do as much good if he prayed to a potato; but Pimple only shook his head and smiled gravely.

Poor little chap, he had need of his faith!

As we neared the coast Chips uncovered the hatches. It was a brilliant day, with clear skies and sparkling seas, the ship leaning gently to a steady breeze of no portentous weight. Captain Hill experienced a resurgence of confidence then, and ordered the royals to be set. The order perked us up.

"Run 'em up, lads! Start a tune, one of you!" cried the mate, and the three yards went aloft to a runaway chorus:

What'll we do with a drunken sailor, what'll we do with a drunken sailor,  
What'll we do with a drunken sailor early in the morning?  
Way, hay! Up she rises! Way, hay! Up she rises!  
Way, hay! Up she rises, early in the morning!

Followed the verses about the Drunken Soldier, the Virgin Mary, and finally the Melbourne Lassies—but the Old Man stopped that. It made no difference, the yards were mast-headed, the sails set.

The ship must have presented a glorious sight, had any been near to see her; but the ocean rolled around us, bare as a clean plate. Now and then a puff heeled us over, and sprays flew; but there was no malice in the breeze. At dinner-time all hands except the mate on watch and the helmsman went below, for the afternoon would be full of work preparing for port. The land was not yet in sight, and, when we had eaten, Pimple and I stretched out on our bunks to 'catch the bird' for a few minutes. We had acquired that trick of the seasoned salt, and could sleep on a plank for a few minutes and jump up to a job fully awake.

We awoke from that nap with a vengeance. There was uproar on deck. The ship was heeling over until, from our bunks, we could see through the open door the lee rail under water and the green sea pouring aboard like Niagara. Pimple and I went hurtling down through the door into the sea. The ship lay on her side, her yardarms dipping; although somebody had let go all halliards within reach, the yards would not start because of the angle of heel. But I saw no more, for when I fell into the sea I came up beneath a sail.

I could never swim, and I clawed along a leachrope, strangling, and tried to climb into the rigging. The ship was partly submerged, and I heard the sea pouring in through her open hatches. Hatch covers and hencoops bobbed all about me, and I fastened desperately upon a cover, kicking out with my legs, warding off with one hand the maze of gear that threatened to sink me. I struggled clear and rested on my raft, gasping. The squall that had stricken us out of a clear sky passed down to leeward; but the ship never recovered. She filled and sank with a dismal bursting of sails and a gurgle of rushing water, leaving a wide vortex into which all sorts of *débris* was drawn.

Chips swam past, pushing a grating, towards a man who was on the point of sinking. He called a cheery word to me. Somebody floundered weakly towards me, and grabbed my hatch cover. It was Pimple. Poor Pimple! His head was cut, and he was almost gone. But he had guts. We helped each other to get the hatch cover securely under our bellies, then lay there, all further effort quite beyond us. With our faces at water-level our horizon was very narrow; now and then we saw objects—men and wreckage; but in half an hour all floating things had drifted apart—we saw nothing but the sea and the laughing skies.

Thirty-six hours later a little steamer, the *Cozumel*, took us from the sea and carried us into Trujillo. We were taken to a doctor's home and there put to bed. When I got up, after a sleep of exhaustion, they told me that Pimple was dead.

I think I cried then. They buried him next day, and seven other survivors were at the funeral. Everybody had loved Pimple.

Bits of news kept coming in. When the steamer *Sibun*, of London, put in at Trujillo on her way home, and gave us passage as Distressed British Seamen, we were told that Captain Hill, his wife, and little son had not been picked up. How many others, if any, survived, I never learnt. As for me, I reached London, drew my money, and bought some clothes; then took the train to Oxford after a total absence of nearly three years.

During the eighty minutes of the train journey I had occa-

sion to think hard. The first reminder I had that my vision was not all it should be came when I tried, and failed, to catch the names of familiar stations as we passed through. The wreck had shaken me; the loss of Pimple had hurt me. By the time I passed through Radley and began to pick up the well-known river reaches I was about ready to present myself in Market Street and say to my father: "Here's your new shopman!"

I went to the house in Albert Street, and a stranger opened to my knock. I learnt that my family had moved to Grandpont. That, surely, I thought, indicated affluence. I walked smartly across Folly Bridge, putting on a roll in case I met anybody I knew, and arrived at Newton Road—a new street which had been a field when last I wandered towards Hinksey. I found at Number Six a nice new little house, with a bit of garden in front and a bigger bit behind—but it was another stranger who opened the door to me. She regarded me coldly.

"Is Lizzie at home?" I asked. The stranger looked at me closely.

"You're not——?" she began.

"Yes, I am," said I. "Is Father at home, then?"

"No. And Lizzie's gone. I'm your stepmother, I suppose. Come in," she said without enthusiasm.

I followed her into a front room and looked around. Not one of the familiar things remained. Gone was *The Death of Nelson*; gone the shell-covered Barbados box, and the big framed photograph of the Salvation Army Rally at the Crystal Palace with a cross indicating Father and me among the bandsmen. Instead, on the walls were nice new pictures—*Reflections*, *A Love Story*, *Stag at Bay*, and a big and utterly explanatory group of a wedding, with Father standing alongside a robust country wench easily to be recognized, and what was apparently all her vast family. Silently I followed the woman into another room—the dining-room. On one wall was a red and silver card, bearing the uplifting motto: "Christ is the Head of this House, the Unseen Guest at Every Meal, the Silent Listener to Every Conversation." On another wall was a lithographed copy of *The Light of the World*. My companion seemed to bridle as I looked around.

"Where's Lizzie gone?" I asked presently.

"She's gone to Glory."

"Jesus Christ!" I gasped, and my stomach felt empty.

"Here, young man," came the instant admonition, "I don't allow that sort o' language in my house. You'll have to behave yourself if you expect to stay here. I've heard all about you. The last words Lizzie spoke was that you stole her scissors."

"That, of course, is a lie," I said shortly. "Lizzie would never say any such thing. I'll go up and see Father at the shop."

My return home was inauspicious. As I walked back over the bridge and up St Aldate's I reconsidered my half-formed resolve to remain at home and try to follow Father's wishes. When I reached Market Street I was already half-hearted about it. An acquaintance stopped me, and in five minutes contrived to make me feel that a homecoming sailor was somebody. Confidence had returned when I stepped into the shop and saw Harry Ellis there, looking exactly like Smike, big-eyed, emaciated, yet pathetically important.

"Dad in?" I asked carelessly.

Harry glowed all over at sight of me. His mouth fell open and grew wet.

"He's round at the Co-op.," he said. "He's on the Committee. I'm prack'ly manager now." He rattled on, pitifully proud, and told me that he was married, earned eighteen bob a week, and had a baby. "Your dad is a busy man now. Into everything, he is, Oddfellows, Co-op., chapel. I help him with the books, and he gives me half-a-dollar now and then." The spate of news was checked, and his big eyes fastened on me with a glare.

"Where've you been all this time? Golly, but you look fine!"

I spun him a yarn about the shipwreck. Poor Harry! His eyes stood out like hatpegs. When at last I left him, he stood in the doorway and gazed after me all along the street. Whatever I decided to do, of one thing I was certain: I'd never barge in and rob Harry Ellis of that proud job. I seem to hear his racking cough even now.

I met my father at home that evening, and he looked as if he wanted to be cordial but hardly dared. My brother sat

gazing at me as if I were some grand creature just dropped from the skies; and, looking at him from time to time, I mentally chalked up a mark to the credit of our new stepmother. The boy at least looked well fed and cleanly clothed in garments that were made for him. He looked really happy.

Father heard my tale of adventures, then once more offered to take me into the shop, and I placed that subject safely beyond all further discussion at once.

"Perhaps I can find something else," said Father hopefully. "I know the editor of the *Chronicle*. I'll speak to him tomorrow."

As we went up to bed, he remarked:

"I won't have no smoking, or drinking, my boy, remember that."

"Nor bad language," the new mother added with a toss of the head.

I lay awake for hours that night, spinning yarns to a worshipping brother; and hours after the little fellow fell asleep, thinking.

I felt that I had earned a week of loafing, and went about it properly. I proceeded to discover Oxford. That beautiful old city that Oxford boys rarely see, because it has become a commonplace to them, took on a charm which still holds me. I visited the country villages of my childhood, and now saw beauties in little thatched cottages, with their paved floors and bottle-glass windows; the old carrier's cart took on a certain quaint charm—now that I could travel by train. Bagley Wood, Radley Common, the Headington country, revealed splendours I had missed when as a trespassing urchin I dodged keepers there. Knowing the caretaker of the Bodleian, through having carried in the past many a bundle of mops and mats to him, I spent hours in Duke Humphrey's Library and discovered in myself a keen affection for books. I sat in the chair made from the *Golden Hind* of Sir Francis Drake, and felt the very essence of far horizons seep through my bones. Not once in that week of loafing did I want to go into a pub for a drink. Girls who turned to look twice at my bronzed face and swaggering roll only earned in response a glassy stare.

But, still, home wasn't home to me. I was glad that the small brother was comfortable, and he was too young to have any serious problems to cause him unhappiness. After I had accompanied him to school, and beat up a couple of bullies who made a daily sport of twisting his big ears, he was landed upon a high pinnacle of security. A half-crown slipped into his hand fully enthroned him.

It was my stepmother who slipped the acid into my milk. We never hit it off. She was intensely religious, and came of a farm family who were all saturated with good works. When they were unable to get to chapel because of bad weather, they always held services in the farmhouse. One of the girls had a baby by the superintendent of some building work near by, who also conducted a Bible class in the village. Another sister returned from domestic service in Kent utterly unconcerned by the fact that she had taken on a well-advanced maternal form. The whole family paraded intense piety, however, and one and all agreed that I was a thoroughly bad lot and ought not to be encouraged to remain at home.

I did try honestly to fit in. I got a job in the publishing office of the *Chronicle*, at ten shillings a week; and visions of an editorial chair danced before my faulty eyes every time I turned into the High. But at home I was for ever clashing with my stepmother. Instead of spending my evenings at home, I began to seek old pals at pubs, and after sinking several shots of rum I used to go home in a sullen mood, brooding upon things in general. A crisis had to come, and St Giles' Fair brought it on.

The good chapel folks had arranged some sort of attraction to keep people away from the wickedness of the Fair. I spent all the hours between leaving the office and closing down time among the noisy, happy crowd, and when I went home, feeling cheerful after a warm rencounter in the Lamb and Flag with an old schoolmate just home from sea, I found my brother in bed weeping his pillow full.

I dragged the story from him by degrees. He had come home to tea and found nobody there, his bread-and-butter and milk being set out for him. Lying by his plate was a shilling, and

quite naturally he thought it was left for him. It was Fair time, and boys and girls were always allowed to spend a few pennies on that annual frolic. He went off full of gratitude for an unexpected treat, and spent the shilling on a wild fling. When the folks reached home, all pious and warm from their chapel dissipation, the stepmother looked for the shilling, which she had laid down and forgotten to pick up on leaving the house. She called my brother a thief, and made Father agree with her. She was buxom, twenty years younger than father, and he yielded to discretion, for she was an overmatch for him.

In the morning I went down to breakfast with blood in my eye. Father sat at the head of the table, looking subdued, while I addressed a few home-truths to his wife in ripe salt-water language, winding up by telling her that she had deliberately set a trap for the boy, and she ought to bow her head in shame.

"I won't have my wife vilified!" my father yelled, when he could get his breath.

"I won't have my brother called a thief by that woman!" I yelled back.

"Get out of my house!" bellowed Father.

"Like a shot!" said I. "Come on, kid. You come with me."

But the small chap dare not tackle so tremendous a decision, and I departed alone. I took a room in a St Aldate's alley, and considered the situation. I continued to see my brother in the street whenever I could intercept him; but I never saw or heard from Father for many a year after that day.

The old chum whom I had met in the Lamb and Flag belonged to Devitt and Moore's *Hesperus*. We spent the rest of his leave together, and decided that when he rejoined his ship I should go to London with him and he would speak to the mate about me. My resignation was handed in at the *Chronicle* office, and I became again for two weeks a simple Jack ashore.



## CHAPTER X

### ROVINGS

ONE night Harvey and I played the man too much and got well fuddled on rum in Tom Taylor's place near Folly Bridge. At closing time we felt adventurous, and adventure to Harvey was feminine. We rolled up St Aldate's, and set sail along the Corn, which was a grand cruising place for muslin. But no muslin hove in sight.

"Let's go down Brewer Street," said Harvey. "I know one on that beat."

We sailed along Queen Street, down St Ebbe's, and tacked into Brewer Street. Sure enough, a tidy craft cruised at the bottom of the lane.

"It's Ratty Ayres," announced Harvey, who knew them all. "We'll take her round behind the church."

Harvey was an old hand, for all his lack of years, and his people allowed him far too much pocket-money for his good. We overhauled the lady, a stout little party of forty, and had I known as much as Harvey about such things I might have wondered why she had to beat St Ebbe's and particularly Brewer Street when the High was full of Cowley militiamen. But the rum was still working. We accompanied the lady to the rails of the graveyard; the buildings of Pembroke College and the backs of the houses cast a deep soft gloom over the scene; the tombstones loomed through the railings. A silence as of the tomb itself reigned for a moment. Then Old Tom crashed out midnight; and while his iron tongue told Oxford all about it, I received my initiation into the order of manhood.

It cost sixpence. I suppose I ought to have gone to my wretched room feeling degraded. I've read such things in books. But the fact is, I outbragged Harvey, and that was bragging indeed. I had become full man.

The day before we were to leave for London I got out of bed in some uneasiness. Something was decidedly wrong. I ate no breakfast, but hurried out to find Harvey and tell him about it. In St Aldate's I encountered a queer, familiar, much-loved figure, flapping along in his rusty cloak on his funny flat feet, showing his kindly, smiling face to all the world. Rusty Harrison! What warmth floods me even to-day when I remember that little parson—the only man I have met in my life who lived the life of the Christ he preached. Harrison earned a pitiful curate's stipend, and every day walked in to Oxford from Ferry Hinksey to spend his precious pennies and more precious time in helping the poorest of Oxford's poor. I stopped him impulsively, for I liked him well. He asked me about my seafaring, began to say that he could see how superb my health was, then stopped to gaze into my face.

"Something's up, old chap. Tell me," he said wisely; and taking my arm he made me walk up the hill with him. I had meant to confide in nobody but Harvey; in five minutes Rusty Harrison knew everything. His deeply lined, understanding face was grave.

"That's not nice, is it?" he said quietly. "If you're the chap I think you are you'll suffer enough without my slanging you. Come along and see Mr Jessup."

Mr Jessup had a chemist's shop near Carfax, and besides being family confidant for most of the people of South Oxford he was a noted angler. The room behind his shop was a museum of fishing-tackle, and he entered the shop at the ring of the door-bell with his mouth full of artificial flies. Mr Harrison told him my trouble, and left me to follow Mr Jessup into the back room, where he examined me.

When he had finished he made an ironic remark about my having fished in muddy waters, told me to take some physic and not to drink alcohol. As he compounded the drench he kept muttering:

"Damned young donkey! Damned young donkey."

But he refused to charge me anything.

Harvey and I went to London, and he spoke to the mate

about me. I was promised a berth as able seaman, which was more than I expected, for the *Hesperus* was a grand ship. Most of her fo'c'sle hands were Italians, and there were about forty midshipmen aft. She was not sailing for a week, so Harvey and I took rooms together in Canning Town to wait.

"You ought to join the R.N.R., Skimps," Harvey told me. "If you get your ticket later on, you'll never get anywhere in the best ships unless you're a Reserve man. Let's go down to the *President*."

I presented myself aboard the old frigate for enrolment, and was taken at once to the surgery. I had not expected that, and quaked a bit, but the surgeon put me through a sight test first, and I regained confidence, for I could postpone any further examination on the plea that I only came to ask for information. I even forgot that my vision was not all it might be. I was soon to learn the truth.

"My son, you're no good for the Navy," the surgeon said curtly. "You're half blind. Didn't you know?" he added, regarding me narrowly.

"Not that it was as bad as that, sir," I said. "I hoped not."

"If you mean to carry on at sea, I advise you to try stewarding," he remarked, showing me out.

"I'm sorry," he called after me, and I thought it nice of him.

All my life I have found surprising kindness in men who had no reason to be kind to me. But I had no intention of becoming a flunkey, an 'up-and-down-stairs son of a bitch' in the vivid language of seamen. I remembered too unpleasantly the steward of the *Godiva*, and regarded him as representative of the breed. The steward of the sailing-ship had been a vague figure owing to the captain's wife being on board, and I had seen little of him. I told Harvey of my failure, and he made a fine joke of it, flatly telling me that I lied about the cause.

"Never mind," he said, "try again when we come home."

But I joined the splendid *Hesperus* and went to sea with a dull fear at my heart.

I stood many a look-out for the other men, hoping thereby

to strengthen my vision. Perhaps it helped. Only once or twice during the voyage to Melbourne and back did I find difficulty in reading the compass while steering, and I sanguinely put it down to blur inside the binnacle glass. In any case I must have given satisfaction, because I was taken on for another voyage.

Harvey had finished his apprenticeship and left the ship to sit for his second mate's examination. He was still at navigation school when we sailed again. By the time we arrived in Melbourne again I had made up my mind to ask for my discharge there; for I had somehow got the idea that if I sat for my examination before an Australian Board I might get through. My other little trouble had yielded to treatment, and I had, besides, learned a valuable lesson in hygiene. As soon as the ship was fast alongside the Railway Pier I asked to be allowed to leave on the plea that I wanted to go up for my ticket.

I had the necessary time in, and I was released, the master of the *Hesperus* giving me a nice letter of recommendation. I took the steamer to Sydney, assured that I had prospects as bright as any young fellow ever had, for all that I had entered my ships through the hawsepipe. I went at once to the medical examiner at Sydney, and my high hopes crashed in a moment. The medico was a lean young Scot, without a soul beyond duty. In less than two minutes I knew my fate.

"Did ye expect to navigate in Braille?" he asked me harshly.

The stubborn devil in me was aroused. I quitted the place more than ever determined that I would never be a flunkey. For days I haunted the wharves where the Island schooners berthed, for I had heard that in the Pacific trade mates' jobs were to be had without a ticket. When I saw some of the skippers and their mates I understood why that might be, and doubted very much if I could ever land or keep such a job, ticket or no ticket, for I was no stalwart hardcase, nor did I look even my modest age. I believed that I could hold my own with any man in mere ability in my work, but in inches I made a poor figure. At the end of a week I was still seeking and my money was getting low. Nothing seemed

to go right. I even tried to find my old sweetheart, Agnes, and wandered about Surrey Hills asking for the name; but it was like shouting for Jock down the engine-room of a Geordie collier. I never found her.

When matters were serious, and I had begun looking over the homeward-bound British ships, I stopped one evening abreast of a little schooner. Two or three brown Islanders were lazily dragging a tarpaulin over the main hatch, while a giant of a white man was absorbed in something about the binnacle. It must have been a ticklish bit of work he was doing, for he was cursing quietly and without pause. The rays of a lantern swinging from the boom shone upon a rough shock of wiry red hair, and picked out the name, *Black Pearl*, on the white canvas cover of the wheel. Some urge drove me ahead of any conscious thought, and I jumped to the deck, landing beside the big man.

"Want a hand, sir?" I asked civilly. The man turned his head, looked me up and down without rising, and grunted:

"I don't carry shopmen," he said, and turned again to his work.

"Who the hell said I'm a shopman?" I retorted angrily. "I'm as good a seaman as you are. Can't you be civil?"

Six-feet-four of the brawniest manhood I ever saw straightened up, and I shuddered. Suddenly the giant threw back his head and roared with laughter, and the brown Islanders stopped work to join in the merriment.

"Damned if the lad isn't spunky!" he laughed. "Where have you been—at sea, I mean?"

I told him, and he nodded at mention of the *Hesperus*. Hastily I added that I had tried to sit for my ticket but failed to pass the sight test. That instant I knew that I was a fool. I ought to have bitten off my tongue before I let that form into words; but I worried needlessly.

"You're not blind, anyhow, or you wouldn't have made two voyages in the *Hesperus*," the red head chuckled. "I know that mate. My boys have all the eyesight I need among the Islands, in any case. But I need a mate. No wages—shares—that's why I'm lacking a mate when I'm all ready to go to sea."

"I'll take it, sir," I said quickly. "I can get my gear down in half an hour."

Thus I made the acquaintance of Kenneth Saunders—"Red" Saunders to thousands of people familiar with the Pacific and the East—and from the very beginning we got along well together. The *Black Pearl* was called eighty tons, but she was little bigger than a Brixham smack, and as easily handled. In her I cruised the Ellice Islands, the Gilberts, some of the Solomons, Samoa, Fiji, and Papua among other new places; sometimes we carried native passengers and a missionary or two; at other times we traded in Island produce, and visited the Queensland ports, and once Singapore and Saigon.

Of all the creatures we carried the missionaries were the queerest cattle. They disliked traders on principle, though their reasons were obscure to me. I never knew Saunders to take anything from natives without giving fair value for it, but the missionaries did, often and shamelessly. Perhaps they argued that they gave value above rubies in teaching innocent children of nature what sin was. Those brown people never knew sin before missionaries descended upon them and taught them; then everything they had done after nature's fashion since Time began became a sin if in any way differing from a missionary habit. There is plenty of sin in the Islands now, and plenty of missionaries—but the native population is fast vanishing. In the early days where the missionary went there was sooner or later sure to be trouble, which war-ships were sent to settle. Where the guns went the flag followed, and after that the Islander no longer owned his home in freehold. Many a missionary, while preaching the Gospel of the humblest Man earth ever knew, got his hungry hooks into rich lands. At least one godly man died a millionaire in the Pacific, as the pineapple trade well knows. It is a predatory religion that the missionaries preach, and few except the Christians have the effrontery to force their faith upon the rest of the world.

In Singapore one trip we ran up against a bad snag. Red Saunders traded much too fairly ever to make money. He had taken his Gilbert Island crew to their homes, and

we ran up to Singapore with a crew of half a dozen home-going Chinamen who left us there to take a north-bound steamer. The skipper returned on board after entering the schooner, looking gloomy.

"I suppose you'll want to quit now," he grunted.

"Why?" I demanded.

"There's nothing to share out—I'm at a dead end, Skimps."

"I'm getting a lot of experience. I'm satisfied," I said.

Red regarded me with a kindly gleam in his eyes, but said no more until we sat at supper, then he uttered abruptly:

"We'll go down to Crozets. Are you game?"

I had sighted the Crozets twice, while running the easting down to Australia. They are bleak little crags, set in the Indian Ocean amidst the foulest of weather in bitter seas. Only stout ships, seeking those southerly latitudes where the roaring westerly winds drive them on their eastward way, ever sight them. I could not imagine how a trip there could produce profit, and said so.

"Perhaps not," Red answered shortly. "I've heard there is, though. The emigrant ship *Strathmore* was wrecked there about thirty years ago, Skimps, and she had on board a lot of comfortable farmers with their families and their capital. That cash was in the skipper's strong-box, and I have never heard that it was recovered. If you're scared, say so. I shan't blame you, laddie. I'd go on my own, but I must have somebody to tend my diving gear. I can raise cash for stores, and I've got an old diving suit that I used years ago pearling." He drank up his coffee, avoiding my glance, and I thought it over seriously.

Oh, well! Treasure has lured older men than I was then. If we found it, I could say "Kiss my hand!" to all the Boards of Examiners in the world. I'd have my own vessel, and run her myself. My fancy soared, and before another day broke I had actually lifted that gold, had built a splendid barque-rigged yacht, and sailed her slap into the Board Room and laid her alongside the table to confound the examiners.

That was stuff of my dreams. It was still a long, long traverse from Singapore to the Crozets.

## CHAPTER XI

### TREASURE-HUNTING

WITH gold over the bows who cares for hardship? Our chief problem was fresh water. The navigation kept us both on the alert until we passed Sunda Strait, between Java and Sumatra, but after that there would be a stretch of some four thousand miles of ocean in which ran few steamer tracks. We estimated an average of a hundred miles a day for the sea passage, thirty days at the islands, and about forty days to return to whatever port we selected, which would be decided by our luck. We must carry water for a hundred days, because we knew that though we could find the Crozets easily enough, we might by no means so easily land there. It might prove impossible to land at all. So we watered at Anjer, and again at Keeling, and at last set out on our lonely traverse feeling fairly hopeful.

"We'll catch all the rain we can," said Saunders, and I agreed with him. I have heard many tales about rainwater at sea—how it stinks, goes rotten, and becomes good again after so many days. Such yarns may or may not be true, for I can't know all there is to know about rainwater. This, however, I do know: for a period of seven years I caught and used exclusively rainwater, and never had it go bad or cause me the least distress; during four years of residence in Bermuda my family and I drank nothing but rainwater, and did not suffer in any degree. My own experience may have been due to the fact that in my yacht I stored water in limewashed metal tanks, while in Bermuda my house roof and water tank were also limewashed regularly. It may be that rainwater goes bad in wooden containers only. Whatever the reason, my experience has been all against the yarns and in favour of rainwater to drink. In the *Black Pearl* we caught rain whenever possible, and came to no harm from it.



The voyage was easy until we drew south of the latitude of the Cape of Good Hope, and then we met the big seas, and, farther south, blustering winds that were all too powerful for our small ship. But she was nicely trimmed, not overloaded with heavy cargo, and we always snugged her down in good time when the weather was too fierce.

We went skittling across the big westerlies, and kept a good look-out for ships. The sailing-ships and steamers of the Shaw, Savill Line, the New Zealand Shipping Company, the Aberdeen White Star, and other lines ran their easting down well to the southward, but we saw only one glint of sail, one streak of smoke until our estimated forty days were up. We had sighted no islands, but were hourly expecting to, when a thick fog came down and we hove-to.

"We're thereabouts, Skimps," the skipper announced after working up the distance from the last sight. "While the fog hangs about, we'll get our ground tackle and diving gear ready. We shan't want to mess about once we sight the island."

Our only navigating timepiece was nothing better than an old Connecticut kitchen clock, and our longitude was of necessity something of a guess. The Crozets are notorious for fog, as they are for gales, so I for one kept a keen look-out while working at the anchors, and wished desperately that my vision had been better.

Our wreck was supposed to have sunk alongside the Apostles, but whether it was completely submerged or not we had to discover. The available records had it that the survivors of the disaster had landed on North-east Island, existing precariously until rescued by a whaler seven months later; and since they had suffered much from privation we assumed that the ship had sunk at least beyond all access to stores. If we hoped that might prove to be true, it was not because we were callous concerning the sufferings of others, but simply because it increased the chance that the gold had never been recovered, and likewise our chance of finding it with our diving gear.

Treasure-hunters are ever sanguine.

The fog lasted for three days, and during that time we laid out all our anchors and warps on deck and prepared our one boat. Saunders had patched up his ancient diving suit, put new washers in the pump, and parcelled some places in the pipes which were leaky. Much as I liked my shipmate, I was glad I was too small to use that diving suit; but he seemed entirely happy in the prospect. The fog bothered him much more than did the possibility of risking his life in what was little better than a suicide's uniform.

We sighted high land while hove-to, but the sound of seas bursting about its base warned us against nearer approach, and we squared away and ran off at once. There was something terribly forbidding in that shadowy glimpse of the islets. Above the crash of seas, and the whine of the wind, the cries of penguins came trickling through the murk like the wailing of castaways.

The weather was bitterly cold. As soon as we hove-to again well to leeward of the danger, Saunders broached a bottle of squareface gin. Next to American prohibition liquor, trade gin is perhaps the most unpleasant drench the human stomach will tackle. It has the kick of a jealous *boomah* kangaroo in rutting season. Saunders was used to it, and he made me swallow half a tumbler of the stuff to keep out the chill. I was so cold that I never tasted it until it landed inside me, but then I saw sparks in the fog, and gasped for ten minutes before I could draw a normal breath. But it did warm me, and I felt ready and willing to tackle anything—except that diving job. Had I taken one more drink like that, I would have fought Red for even that privilege.

The fog cleared, and a strong westerly breeze settled in. We beat up for the islands again, and sighted them after four days. Luck was kind to us, for the sea fell almost calm, and the wind dropped to only a pleasant air as we drew near, so that it was fairly comfortable in the lee of the Apostles.

We lost no time. Two anchors were let go to windward, with springs on the cables; two kedges were carried ashore in the boat and secured in the rocks. Then we sounded all round the schooner with the boat. It was no trouble to locate

the wreck, but it was no simple matter to work our vessel into position. Two men may easily sail such a vessel as ours over all kinds of wide ocean, but when it comes to handling ground-tackle beef is required. Saunders had it to spare—I was still only Skimps. It took us all day to moor the schooner, and as night fell the fickle weather showed signs of changing again.

We slept all standing, and turned out before dawn to swallow scalding coffee well laced with gin. Abominable muck as it was, it drove out the appalling chill of morning; and before the sun dawdled up in the east I was pumping air down to my shipmate, keeping an eye on the weather, and watching the mooring lines as well. I saw the bubbles rising, following them in fascination as Red moved about below. When he signalled at last I sent down a bundle of crowbars and mentally counted our salvage. When no more signals came for what seemed to be a long time, I grew uneasy. The western horizon looked foul, and I felt tremendously alone. The bubbles continued to rise, but only in one spot now, and hope fought against fear.

After nearly an hour Red signalled furiously for more line. The line hung slack, and so I signalled him. The line ran through my hands, but the air-pipes hung down in a bight. Then I got really scared, for Saunders had obviously fouled something. I pulled hard, signalling my frantic question, and back came the order:

“Haul up!”

I let go the pump and set my back to hauling. Red was stuck. I hauled until my nose bled, then up he came, upside down, his lead-soled boots missing, and a knot tied in his air-pipe, which had parted. Whipping the line over a snatch-block rigged for the hoisting of our treasure, I laid back and slowly dragged my mate over the rail. My fingers fumbled at his fastenings, and his own fingers sought the nuts of his face-glass. At long last he sat up free, and sucked in great draughts of air.

“The damned pipe fouled a broken iron plate,” he panted. “I dropped my knife, and had to pull the pipe apart. Give

me a hooker of squareface, Skimps; I've looked a sticky end right in the eye."

I wanted to hear about the gold, but Red proceeded to get out of his gear altogether, which did not seem hopeful. Then he gave one glance at the weather, and sprang into the boat.

"You blind bat!" he yelled at me. "Didn't you see that coming?"

He flung an arm towards the west, and sculled furiously to the rocks. He was like a gorilla for strength, in spite of his recent ordeal. Those kedges came out of the rocks and into the boat as if they were no heavier than grapnels; then he hauled the boat back to the schooner by means of the warps. I had already started to tie down a double reef in the mainsail, and when we had hauled kedges and warps aboard he tackled the foresail. We had her reefed down in fifteen minutes, but we could not get our big anchors; we slipped one, and the schooner dragged the other out of the ground as she ranged about.

Then we got sail on her and let the hook drag, for we had no time to fool with it. It would soon be in deep water anyhow. I stood by the headsails, ready to let the chain run if the anchor caught the bottom again; but the wind came in a fierce squall, and then we had enough to do to keep clear of that line of savage reefs to leeward. Saunders stood bare-headed at the helm, steering coolly; but he was whistling, which was always a bad sign in him. I crouched with my head below the foot of the fore staysail, watching the thundering surf, until I got panicky, certain that we could never win clear. I felt the thrum of the dragging cable, and feared the anchor had taken hold. Knocking up the windlass pawl with my boot, I let the chain go and leapt clear of the flying end. Red had seen to it that all cable-ends were free before we moored over the wreck, and I now realized how wise he had been. I felt a bit stuck up on my own account too, for I believed that only my action had saved us from destruction.

"You silly awss!" roared Red, as the cable-end shot over-

board. I saw the vessel's head swing, and heard the mainsheet whizz through the blocks as he rolled the wheel up. We were clear. We shot down wind, past the roaring crags, travelling like steam before a rising gale that already had painted the sky hell-colour.

"You silly sheep," the skipper bawled, "you've lost me a good anchor and chain. What did you do it for, you fool?"

I went aft in fury, but Red met me laughing, his momentary anger gone along with the peril.

"You did right, Skimps," he said. "You're a better man than you'll ever look. Take the wheel while I put on some boots."

We hove her to again, and ate some food, while Red told me about the wreck.

"That ship's in a mess, Skimps. I bent those crowbars into horseshoes breaking away twisted frames. If there's anything in her strong-box, or even a strong-box at all, it'll need dynamite to get it." Red ate silently for a while, then remarked with a grin: "We need a better diving outfit, too. I had you scared, didn't I?"

"I don't scare so easily," I retorted. "I knew you were never born to be drowned. Where are we bound for now, though? We're still broke."

"We're going to get out of these damned cold seas as quick as we can drive her; then we'll have a try on the Western Australian pearling grounds. We'll be short of grub pretty soon."

So we drove her across the heavy quartering seas, making north with a little easting. As she raised her latitude the sun gave heat, and we caught some fish sometimes to eke out our provisions. When we agreed that we were far enough to the north, we swung off due east, and grumbled because we had both forgotten to check our clock while at the Crozets. Our longitude was very uncertain, but I believed, as he did, that we were to the eastward of the meridian of Amsterdam Island; therefore we trimmed her to steer herself, and let her ramble, catching up on sleep while we felt certain we had a whole ocean ahead of us.

The night after we turned east, however, we struck with terrific force in the darkest hour, and the sea rolled us out among the splinters of our little ship. A bit of wreckage broke my cheekbone, and knocked me completely out; when I came to, I lay on a heap of sand, my head bandaged in a bit of shirt, and Red was kneeling over me with anxiety in his strong face. Dawn was just breaking.

"Shamming, eh?" growled Red when I opened my eyes, but I knew that he growled to hide his real concern.

"Where are we? What struck us?" I bleated.

"St Paul, I think it must be," he answered, peering into my face. "The schooner's busted to hell, and I can't see enough left of her to build a fire with. Can't you stand up, you poor apology of a man?"

I scrambled to my feet, the world spinning around, and the earth leaping madly beneath my feet. Red's great arm slipped about me, and he led me up the shore.

"That's the stuff, Skimps," he said gently. "Got to make the effort, you know. I've been trying to stir you up with kindness for hours. I thought sure enough you had sailed for Fiddler's Green, laddie." Then he laughed. "You're a hot-headed pup when a fellow gets under your hide. How d'ye feel now?"

"Thirsty."

"That, Skimps, is going to be our trouble, I'm afraid," he said gravely.

When full daylight came, I tottered after him and we scanned the shore for wreckage. Of the schooner we saw nothing. Something bobbed about in the surf a hundred yards out and Saunders waded and swam after it. He came back swearing, dragging the white canvas wheel-cover on which the schooner's name was painted.

"If this got washed out of where I stowed it, she must have busted all to bits," he announced gloomily. "We'll have to try another tack, Skimps. There ought to be a store hut somewhere about the crater. I'm hungry, as well as sore. Come on, laddie."

## CHAPTER XII

### CRUSOES

IN the middle of the island was a crater lake or lagoon, about three-quarters of a mile wide. That fixed the place for us. St Paul it was. The island was craggy, volcanic, with no trees or even heavy bushes. Only a tangle of grass, among which we started a horde of rats, rabbits, and goats. Red tried to catch a rabbit, but it had the speed of an electric hare, and Red grinned at his failure. We scrambled round the crater, seeking water, but all we found were pools in the rocks, and the water was hot and tasted as if sewer-cleaners' boots had been boiled in it. On the northern side of the crater, however, we spied a small stone hut, which had been thatched, but the winds had ripped the thatch partly off. We made for the shelter hungrily.

The door hung from one hinge, and on the door was a board with some French words painted into chiselled grooves. Saunders said it stated that here were food and clothing for shipwrecked mariners. I couldn't guarantee that, the only languages I ever got a smattering of, besides my own, being Coastwise Hindustani and seagoing Italian. We entered the hut. A ripped tarpaulin partly covered two or three barrels, broken and coated with tar and sand. We pulled the stuff about, but somebody had visited St Paul and made a main-sail haul of the grub. A broken hatchet lay in the sand, and Saunders handled that ominously as he completed the search.

"Sealers or whalers, they were no seamen!" he muttered.

We went from the hut. On the board inside, which was a duplicate of the one on the door, was a direction for finding water. We followed it, north-west by the sun, and soon came upon a hot-water spring which had less of the foul taste of the pools. Hot as it was, we drank it gladly. With the hatchet, and water, we hoped for the best.

When I could make my legs behave, we searched the island narrowly. There was a flagstaff, placed there by the French vessel which established the store hut. On that we lashed Red's outer shirt. We sought salvage from our wreck, but she had struck on the weather side and had vanished. Except for the broken barrels in the hut we saw not one stick of wood. We found wild-cats, living comfortably with rats and rabbits; the goats we chased took to the crags, and travelled like chamois. For our first meal we perforce ate penguin, and vowed to eat no more until forced by hunger and exhaustion to do so. Towards night I caught a big crayfish in a rocky crevice, and we boiled it in a steaming pool. We were sick during the night, and the penguins ruined our sleep.

We sat on the sand looking at each other, when day broke.

"This is all on account of a blooming Yankee dollar clock!" said Saunders. "It must have been twenty minutes out."

"It's all because I forgot to check it at the Apostles," I retorted. "You had enough to think about. I've kidded myself I'd make a navigator. Let's stop belly-aching, and do something sensible."

I was beginning to feel proud of my nautical knowledge, and to resent my mistakes. I have made plenty since that day; and I have not forgotten one. Sometimes I have camouflaged them under an awning of assurance, but in my heart I know them and don't feel at all proud about my success in hiding them from the world.

First of all we made an inventory of our possessions. We had no cutting tools besides that broken hatchet; no twine, or canvas from which to twist it. We tried to draw threads from the ripped tarpaulin, but the tar had made them brittle. We had clothes enough for our persons, but from none could we get threads long enough in fibre to spin into fishlines or rabbit snares. We tried to make snares from the grass, and we caught rabbits, but the rabbits ate their way out. A rabbit which I knocked over with a rock was stolen from under my hands by a big wild-cat. Of



stores there were none. Our first need was a regular food supply, for we baulked at crayfish, of which there were swarms.

The island was distinctly volcanic; the earth was warm, but the nights were cool. Red had a pocket matchbox with watertight lid, and there were several matches in it; but of fuel there was only the woodwork of the hut and the broken barrels inside it. We made a fire of some barrel wood, hoping to keep it going always; but the sand that had been stuck into the tar while wet, to help preserve the contents, killed the fire. We gathered piles of grass, and by keeping short watches during the night contrived to keep a smoulder going.

"We must catch a goat, Skimps," said my comrade. "We'll try to corner one among the crags."

For hours we drove goats. Towards dusk we separated a big Billy from two companions and got between him and the lower land. He had to climb. With rocks and howls we scared him into taking a craggy pinnacle.

"Now, Skimps," said Saunders, spitting on his hands, "you go ahead and drive him upwards. I'll stand by to head him off if he jumps over you. Go on! What're you afraid of?"

It was not fear so much as a sinking sensation at my stomach. That old billy-goat turned to look at me a dozen times, and in his eyes I saw stony callousness which was doubtless equalled by his stony skull. When he had climbed almost to the peak, and I still followed, Billy put down his head, uttered a warning "Ba-aa-aahh!" and began to scuff the rock with his hind feet.

"Go on! He's ours!" growled Saunders, pinching my stern. I was between devil and deep sea, for if that devil in front ever hit me, I'd go sailing clear over Red's head into the thirty-fathom depths of the crater. And behind me was Red Saunders himself, who could pick me up with one hand and boot my rear end without taking a hurried breath.

I crept upward. Twice when the goat made as if to butt me I made a grab for his beard, and he drew back. Again I felt a merciless pinch behind, and heard Saunders curse at

me to go on, so up I went, breathing a hope that if I were not utterly destroyed by the billy-goat I might land softly when I fell. The goat stood on the pinnacle, and his eye was red. I shuddered, and shut my own eyes to the terror before. Something happened. I opened them. The great right arm of my shipmate flashed over my shoulder, his great right fist grabbed the billy-goat's forelegs, and with a snatch and a whirl the beast was swung backward over me, to crash against the rock on which he stood.

That goat was old and high and tough, but he was the beginning of much better things. His hide and sinews, bones and hair, made us snares and fishing gear and covering for our feet, which were badly broken and infected by the sharp rocks. We stored our meat in the hut, and the rats stole it. We placed it on rocks, and the cats ate it. In the end we took the door from the hut, laid it on a pile of stones raised in the centre of a wide pool, and placed our meat upon that.

Eleven weeks! In one week our diet of parboiled goat and fish and medicinal warm water reacted upon our dispositions. In two weeks we were not speaking to each other, but, after eating, each took his lonely way and wandered over the island seeking for anything which might be made into a floatable raft. The loneliness was terrific. Even the penguins departed, and the goats' vocal noises sounded like sardonic laughter.

Saunders had read much about all the islands of the sea on which a freelance skipper might perchance find profit; but he had scarcely given a second thought to St Paul or Amsterdam Islands. He had told me a little: that Réunion fishermen had once frequented St Paul; that whalers had used it for watering; that many ships had come to grief there. Surely there must be left some trace of these. If only we found a broken, half-buried boat we might work out our own salvation. It was about the end of the seventh week that Saunders sent a yell pealing around the crater that awoke the echoes and reached me on the far side.

"Hey, Skimps! Here's a find!"

I went scuttling around like a crab, my heart thumping at the sound of his voice again, regardless of the words. I

found him tugging at a piece of rotten wood in which was a copper spike. The wood broke off in his hand as I reached him.

"Dig!" he grunted, and continued scraping away sand from the jagged timber. With bits of the wood we uncovered we dug until our hands were raw. By evening, our nails broken to the quick, we had bared a row of timbers and some copper sheathing. Most of the night was spent in forming rough shovels from pieces of copper hammered round split and rotten planking.

"We'll get enough wood out of it to make a raft, if not a boat," Saunders said as we lay down to rest.

The job seemed hopeless from the beginning. Most of the wood was rotten; a piece of teak which would not crumble sank when we tested its floating power in the crater. We dug for two weeks, for hope lay at the bottom of the pit we made. By the time we reached what seemed to be the hold or saloon of a sizeable craft, we had collected half a ton of nails and spikes, and a heap of wood as big as a small hayrick. But our great need was a rope. The wood split under the nails when it didn't crumble in our hands. But we made fishhooks, and spears, and traps; our food problem was no longer exciting.

We made clothes of goatskins; and Saunders fashioned a dainty little needle from a fishbone, with which he sewed a lot of goatskin bags.

"We'll need 'em to carry water, Skimps, if we ever float away from here," he smiled.

At the end of the tenth week we faced our daily labour with nausea. Everything seemed futile. Saunders urged on the work, believing we might still find sound wood. Whatever the vessel had been, she was thoroughly broken apart, for her interior was full of sand and stones. Then one morning, starting to dig in the sand, our shovels struck something solid in the shifting heap. We had got beyond surprises; but still we shovelled, and presently I was hurled aside, Saunders flung down his shovel, and I could see his broad back straining as he lifted something with his hands.

"It's a box!" I gasped, scrambling to my feet.

"What eyesight!" grunted Red, and staggered out of the kneedeep sand to the open air with his find.

"Can't say what the old hooker was," he muttered, "but this looks like a cash-box to me, Skimps. Strong as the *Strathmore's* safe, too. Let's burn it open!"

We built a fire and tended it for hours, watching that little box as if it contained the riddle of life itself. Day was nearly done when the hard wood and metal of the box burst open; then we both ran into the embers and kicked madly at the pieces, for the dull gleam of gold was there. We kicked fire all over the place, and scraped a clear spot around the gold. All hot and yellow it lay, and when it grew cool we counted it—two thousand Australian sovereigns! I stared at Saunders in awe. It was my first—and only—treasure find. To me it looked like steam yachts and race-horses. Saunders uttered a queer laugh, and kicked the coin into a shower.

"I'd swap it all for a ten-foot dinghy!" he said. The thought was like a douche of icy water upon my enthusiasm.

In three days more we had fallen back into our wearisome routine. The coin was put into two of the water bags and sunk in the crater near the shore. We fell into silences again, each plodding his own road, hoping against hope now to find rafting materials.

On the first morning of the twelfth week we rose from uneasy sleep. A little barque lay hove-to at a safe distance from shore, and a boat was on its way in.

"Skimps! Run like hell!" cried Saunders, and the boat's crew must have stared at the spectacle of two ragged castaways dashing madly from their rescuers. But Red Saunders was not mad. We reached the crater and lifted the coin bags. With speed we divided the gold into four smaller lots and tied up the bags. We tied two bags apiece around us, beneath our rags, already shapeless enough.

"Don't say a word!" he warned me. "If anybody's earned it, we have."

We went to meet the boat. The officer believed us when

we said we had been startled. The barque was the *Actæan*, of Port Louis, and it was to Port Louis we went, to be made much of by the good people of Mauritius. It was all I could do to keep our secret. We divided the money in what I considered to be a very fair manner: Saunders took one half to pay for his schooner, and we took half each of the remainder. It gave me more money, in solid gold coin, than I had ever hoped to see in one pile in my life. We were too utterly destitute for the authorities to bother us.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ONE SMALL HUMAN

SEVERAL things happened in Mauritius which bore heavily on my future. My broken cheekbone had never ceased troubling me. In Port Louis I was able to have it properly attended to, and I paid for the job with Australian gold, which was not such a rarity then as later. The pain never left me, however, and although while on St Paul I had managed to hold up my end with Red Saunders, as soon as the stress was lifted I experienced a serious let-down. Red was very good to me then. He came to me one day after we had been two weeks in Port Louis.

"Skimps," he said, sliding a basket of fruit behind a bowl so that I was not supposed to see it, "I've got a new vessel. I'm going to cut out foolishness and go trading again. You've been a good shipmate, and the longer you stay ashore the longer you'll have a fat head. Let's get back to the Pacific, and trade hard-boiled. There's money in it. You put in half of your dibs against my equal amount. I'll put in the vessel to boot, and we'll share as we shared the quidlets."

The man's ideas of equal sharing amused me. It was characteristic of him. As he had lost before because he was too fair, he now proposed to take a partner on more than fair terms. I hated the atmosphere of the sick-room. I felt that my face would never ache if I could get to sea again. Besides, my feet itched for a lively deck. That itch was to plague me all through life, and while I write I feel certain that it will torment me to the end of the traverse.

"I'll be ready in three days," I said.

Secretly I scouted around and found the new ship. She was a schooner, bigger than the *Black Pearl*, called the *Maria*—a terrible name, I thought. But she was a good-looking little ship, and Saunders had a crew already putting her

in trim for sea. Full of money for the first time in my life and eager to recover the feeling of freedom which I only felt when at sea or with sea folk, I drifted around Port Louis and looked the place over. I wanted to get a haircut and shave, for my beard had not been reaped since I first met Saunders, and I felt very conscious of my raggedly hairy face. Outside the cable office I bumped into a fellow a bit older than myself, as I judged, and his appearance of desolate furtiveness struck me hard. I was a sailor ashore with money to burn, and the man looked troubled. I forgot my haircut and shave, and watched him. He drifted along the street, paused outside a liquor-shop, and then ducked inside as if fearful of notice. I followed him in, and sat at a table, ordering a drink. If you want to know how I felt, just try being penniless from birth until manhood, and then stick your fists into a sandpile and haul out several hundred golden quids. You'll probably behave as foolishly as I did—unless you were born with the miser's or financier's nature. The man I had followed sat at a table in a corner, and looked glum. When my drink came I told the waiter to ask the gentleman in the corner to have a drink with me. I saw him glance my way, then he slouched over to join me.

"Trouble?" I asked quietly.

He swallowed his liquor at a gulp, and looked hard at me. He was a bit older than me, judging by the lines about his eyes and mouth; but not very much older, and if he had grown a beard we might have passed for brothers in so far as build, height, and general outward appearance went.

"Only broke," he said shortly. I ordered more drinks.

"You're a seaman?" I suggested. "Can't get a ship?"

He laughed unpleasantly. As if on a sudden impulse, he dived into an inside pocket and hauled out a leather wallet.

"Get a ship! Look these over. My trouble is that I have to get home. To hell with ships, except to take passage on. I never liked 'em anyhow. I've been a wild rover, as the song says; now I have the chance to settle down in the Old Man's business, marry the girl I want, and I'm strapped

here in Mauritius, so broke that the police are looking sideways at me. Look at my duds! If I went aboard a steamer asking for a passage they'd dump me overboard."

I had riffled through his wallet papers. He had discharges as second mate, a second mate's ticket, and a mate's, and a master's. I noticed a blank period since the last discharge—but I had sense enough not to comment upon that. A wild thought was beating its wings in my head. I recalled my experience with the R.N.R. surgeon, and with the doctor in Sydney. Everything in the past, present, and future was spread out before me. Nervously I ordered more drinks, jingled my gold, and felt the heavy belt about my body. Now it was I who gulped down a drink. Before I could lose my hot inspiration I blurted out, a bit ashamedly:

"If you mean it—that you have no use for the sea—why not sell these?" I tapped the papers. Of course I did not believe he would. No seaman would ever part with his precious tickets—for which I would have given my very soul if my own name could be on them. But I had taken a step; I took the plunge.

"I'll give you a hundred quid for the lot," I said.

"A hundred—God's truth, but you didn't look drunk!" he gasped. He started to get up. I dribbled some gold coins on to the table, and he sat down, peering into my hairy face.

"I can't get mine, because my sight's rotten," I said. "You hate the sea, and I'll sell my hope of a seventh heaven to know nothing but the sea. If there's no endorsement against your ticket, I'll give you a hundred pounds right here and now." I unfastened my belt.

"If you're not drunk, and not crazy, my son, you've bought 'em!" the man snapped.

He hastily showed me the backs of the papers, and traced his fingers over their fronts. They were clean. I noticed that the date of his second mate's ticket agreed with the date at which I might have passed had I sat at the bare end of four years' experience and been two years older. I weighed up all the possible consequences, and believed that I could beat the game. I never asked another question. Later on I dis-



believed his tale of the job and the girl. Whatever his real trouble might have been, I never knew nor did I ever try to learn. I took him to a more secluded spot, counted out his money, and stuck the wallet safely inside my clothes. I saw him enter a steamship office, then a clothing store, and his haste was convincing. I quitted watching him after that, and went off to find Saunders.

"Red, I'm not going trading with you," I said. "If you're thinking of putting in at any Australian port I'll go as far as that. Then I'm going into deep water again."

"Lord love you, Skimps, you're still a silly awss!" stated Red. "But luck to you whatever you do! I'll land you at Perth."

On the passage across I got Red to do me a last kindness. I was still a bit uneasy about using those papers. Saunders had a master's ticket, and I knew he was a first-rate seaman. I got him to set me a paper, as if he were the hardest examiner alive; begged him to put me through it as if he hated me. I had read up all the stock examination papers of the schools before trying my luck with the Sydney Board. Red set me all that work, and more; instead of the usual routine questions which were asked *viva voce* at examinations, and which can be learnt parrot fashion, he formulated stiff problems in ship management and higher seamanship which gave me furiously to think. But I satisfied him, and when he had seen the result he said:

"You haven't much to learn, Skimps, that's a fact. But still you are a damned fool. You'll never pass the sight test unless you use a telescope. Better change your mind and stick with me."

My course was set, and I left Saunders in Perth. A glance through the papers I had bought—of which I had told Red nothing—showed me that I had never traded to Western Australia. Therefore I had no qualms at starting out on my new career in Perth, and Fremantle was not a bad place for possible sailing-ships. I frequented the waterside in my whiskers and square-rigged clothes, not afraid to spend money, never letting my appearance belie my claim of solvent

marinership able to pick and choose employment. But still, actually, I was very wary. I wanted no ship trading to England, or to anywhere else visited by the man whose name I was using. For these reasons my stay in port was extended beyond my pleasure. Only after two months did luck come my way. Then one evening a ship floated in and anchored in the Bay. At first I paid little heed to her; but there was a familiar look about her which scarcely squared with her Italian flag. I hung about until a boat came ashore. A sick man was taken out of it, and put into a carriage. I approached the boat's crew, who were waiting at the steps. They were nearly all Italians, though one at least was a squarehead.

"What ship?" I asked.

"*Sophocles*."

Then I knew her. The Aberdeen White Star ship, sold, as so many fine vessels were being sold then, to an alien flag. No wonder she looked familiar, for she was a pretty little ship and well known.

"Man sick?" I inquired. I tried to remember the few words of Italian learnt from the Italian seamen of the *Hesperus*.

"Second mate. I think he die," came the indifferent reply.

"You have a drink of wine?" I invited, a nod embracing the whole boat's crew. All but one man leapt ashore, and I took them to a pub, sending down a bottle for the boat minder. And I learnt all possible details about the ship, her master, and her voyage. She was tramping; bound from Wallaroo to Singapore, and after that the wide ocean. I waited for the carriage to return; and then braced up to the fat little man who had accompanied the sick officer. He was the master. This being my first venture under false colours, I suddenly felt bereft of all my new-found assurance. I had resolved, of course, never to use my papers to secure employment in passenger-ships; but I did mean to achieve command if possible, and so convince myself that nothing but bad eyesight could defeat my ambitions. I was convinced already, for I knew what I knew; but I meant to have tangible proof in the shape of discharges given into my own hand.

"If you want a second mate, sir, I'm doing nothing," I opened in casual, friendly fashion. I had heard the skipper speaking good English in paying off his cabman. He was looking me over with quick little glances, and I added for good measure: "I have been with Italians, Captain. I know most of the Italian words for ship use."

"Oh, Italian!" he grunted with a shrug. "I have perhaps three Italians. The rest——" He spread his hands helplessly. I lugged out my wallet, trying hard to keep my hands steady. He riffled the papers through. "I cannot pay Australian wages," he said. "I can pay Italian wages, or I can sail without a second mate."

"I don't care about the wages," I exclaimed eagerly. "I want to put in the time while waiting for a ship that's building. Shall I get my dunnage down to the boat?"

The long and short of it was that I made a voyage as second mate of the *Sophocles* to Singapore, to Moji, to Caleta Buena, then to San Francisco. I didn't want to go to 'Frisco, but neither did I want to be paid off in the nitrate port. I told the skipper I would quit the ship in San Francisco, and he seemed glad. I don't think he ever felt quite comfortable with me, though my work satisfied him completely. He kept asking me, repeating the question every passage, why I was content to sail in an Italian ship on Italian wages when I held such good papers. I told him first about needing to put in the time, then that I had always admired the ship, and at last that I had been in trouble over a girl at home (taking inspiration from something the mate had told me about the skipper's son) and didn't want to go home yet.

But I had no intention of remaining in California. There should be no need, since in those years 'Frisco Bay was wadded tight with ships whose crews had cleared out to a man. The very first day I was ashore, my pay in my pocket, I saw excellent reason for getting right out. I met the padre at the Mission, and he remembered me, whiskers and all! The man wanted to use his influence to get me a ship—and of course he called me by name, which was not at all like the name on my discharge from the *Sophocles*. I thanked him, put

something in his mission-box, and left town the same night for Vancouver. That padre was friend to every seaman or sea boy who ever landed through the Golden Gate in his time; it was no fault of his that he found in me a bad biscuit.

In Vancouver I felt the old qualms again. Even though I had made an excellent voyage in the *Sophocles*, and never once felt uneasy about my position, I suppose the fear was always lurking in me that sooner or later somebody would discover my secret. Just what could be done to me I didn't know. I knew, of course, that if a disaster happened to any ship I was in, I'd be dropped upon heavily—perhaps even imprisoned, if death occurred. It may establish the intensity of my protest against the accident of vision which alone forbade me to achieve my ambition legitimately that even when I thought of the uttermost penalty I might be called upon to pay it never made me give up the notion. I only drew the line where somebody else stood to lose by my action. That came a little later on, as will be seen. For the present, I found a ship needing a mate. The old *Thermopylæ*, cut down to a barque, and in Canadian Register, lay in Vancouver ready to sail for Rangoon. It was queer how the two first ships I ventured in under my false colours should be the famous old clippers I had read about and whose lads I had envied. I made only the one voyage to Burma and Japan; then heard that the ship was going to England shortly. I didn't want to go to England in her or in any other vessel under my purchased name. I left the smart old ship in Yokohama, and took steamer to Calcutta. The Hooghly was also full of ships then, and I hoped for a choice of vessels in the Far Eastern trade, which had a strong allure for me. Some influence, however, was working within me to no agreeable end. I met plenty of masters and mates in Calcutta. I met also very many young seamen who had failed in their examinations and still dragged out their lives in the fo'c'sles of windjammers. Once I saw old Mr Clark, still second mate of a little tramp steamer, and he was as glad to see me as I was to see him. When I rashly told him I had been second mate and mate in sail, his kindly old eyes gleamed with good-will. He at once

wanted to introduce me to his skipper. I promised to go aboard his ship. But I never did. Fear climbed upon my back and drove me into hiding until Mr Clark had sailed down the big river. Never once during my actual employment under another man's name had I felt uncertain of myself. In so far as ability went, I knew I was as capable as any man with a blue seal on his ticket. My vision was not so faulty that I experienced any difficulty in my daily work; yet I could never pass a sight test, never get the certificate which alone could establish me in the profession I loved with all my soul. Calcutta was too full of seamen from all parts of the world; sooner or later I must fall foul of somebody who had known that other man as Mr Clark had known me. I began to avoid the main streets, and to frequent furtively the more devious places by night. My money melted. I spent nearly six months in the port, and only half-heartedly looked for a ship. In the end I looked for some small country vessel, bound to Batavia, or Akyab, or Chittagong, anywhere but the greater ports on the thickly travelled routes.

All this time I was growing less sure of the future. The first flush of assurance had faded. One evening I got into a crowd of P. & O. stewards—nice clean young fellows who seemed to have money and to know how to enjoy their leisure. I had never met flunkeys like them. They were not in the least like the steward of the *Godiva*, or any other steward I had been shipmates with. I played billiards with them, and drank gin and tonic with them. They talked of what they had 'made' coming out, of what they expected to 'make' going home. Most of them were Masons, and they spoke of their prospects of being made smoking-room barman, or deck steward, or forecabin steward. They talked glibly of orlop-deck rooms, and the gun-deck and hurricane-deck. I was hearing about a strange part of the world of waters. I asked a question and they laughed at my beard. P. & O. stewards didn't favour whiskers apparently. But I was as young as some of them, and asked the question again in all gravity. I heard all about Mickey Roach, the London shore purser who engaged the stewards. I heard tales about him, of his gruff-

ness, his bad language, his deep-lying human kindness and the wish to help, which he tried to smother by the gruffness and bad language.

I left those lads determined to go to London and start all over with a clean page. It was no use. I did not want to be a sea flunkey. I could not reconcile myself to the idea at all. And yet, could I do so, a considerable career might be open to me. The puzzle tormented me. In the end I decided to get to London anyhow, let the event prove what it might. I again went aboard ships bound for home, and now I sought a berth in my own name, with my boy's discharges, copies of which I had got from Tower Hill. The ancient clipper *City of Hankow* lay ready for sea, lacking hands. With my boy's discharges and my man's whiskers, and my general air of experience, I caused the mate to look me over pretty keenly. I said I had been in small craft around the Islands for a year or two, and they gave no discharges. I was given work, and performed it to the mate's satisfaction, apparently, for he signed me on, and off I sailed for London.

Nothing of note happened. The passage took nearly six months. Water went a bit low, stores were rotten; the only reading matter in the fo'c'sle was a copy of the *War Cry* in Hindustani. We docked in the Victoria Docks, and I took train for Oxford to think over matters in the quiet of the old city.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LOOSE ENDS

THERE were changes in Oxford. The trams now ran to Hinksey. The alterations to Brasenose were finished; the scaffolding was almost down from St Mary's spire. People "viewed with alarm," as usual. The trams spoilt Folly Bridge—the bridge would never bear the traffic. Brasenose's clean face spoilt the noble High. Some slums had been pulled down in St Thomas's, and clean new tenements put up. Oxford "wuzn't what she wuz." I heard from my brother—who was going to be apprenticed to a hairdresser—that Father was buying a house in a new street. Things were looking up. But even that wasn't right. The builder had persuaded Father to have an inside toilet. That was sad. The woman said it wuzn't healthy! It'd make 'em all ill. Nasty, she called it, who had been used to walking a furlong for the purpose. I found a lot of improvements in the city; but stay-at-homes, who, as stay-at-homes will, refused to grow up with the changes, saw nothing but stark ruin in the new notions. What had been Oxford for a thousand years wasn't Oxford any longer. Why, they'd be having factories next! People with more daring than brains were trying a new-fangled carriage that ran with an engine. What fools! Get a horse! Old professors and young students wrote angrily to the papers about it. Oxford was in a state of anarchy. The foundations of civilization were shaking! Many of those students are now in Parliament, and they show little evidence that their brains have developed since they "viewed with alarm" the advent of the motor-car and the possibilities of factories near Oxford. A lot of them mistook the gift of tongues for brains. A lot of politicians make the same mistake to-day.

If there is anything certain in life except death, it is change; and perhaps that alone is certain, since death itself

is but a change. I find that few people who grow up in constant adjustment to inevitable changes ever "view with alarm" in the staid and preserved columns of our most conservative Press. It is the aged man or woman, still living in the age of his or her youth, who can look up at an aeroplane in the sky and maintain vehemently that there's no such thing. . . .

Home still being closed to me, I stayed away and heard whatever news there was through my brother. There was a new baby at home. The brother, who had always vowed that he'd follow me to sea, was a bit shamefaced when I twitted him about his choice of a career. But he gave excellent reasons, I confess. I don't see what else he could have done, unless he took that ever-open job at the rope-shop and diddled poor consumptive Harry out of it. Since I had last seen him the kid had fallen on the fire, suffering a severe burn which developed into an ulcer over the heart and kept him an invalid for months. He had also fallen and broken an arm, which was improperly set and had to be broken again and treated with a galvanic battery for more months. The arm is to-day a little bigger than a stick, though the lad has grown into a vast man much bigger than me. His growth was retarded by his mishaps, and the sedentary life of a hairdresser certainly seemed to offer him a chance. The other lad at the place where he was apprenticed had a wooden leg. Yes, I considered that he was doing right. He said he was happy at home, too. That gave me more pleasure than anything else I heard. The stepmother was doing him well. He confessed to me that he had "found God" at the chapel, which perhaps had something to do with it. The woman put tremendous store in that sort of thing, though it never prevented her speaking and acting like a heathen when put out. Whatever her reason, I forgave her much because she treated the laddie kindly. I occasionally saw my father in the street, but never approached him, nor did he suggest through my brother that I should.

The first day I was in Oxford I met an old acquaintance. He invited me to attend his wedding, which was to be on the



following morning. We spent his last bachelor evening together, and drank quite a lot. I noticed that he drank wildly, even for him; wildly even for a young fellow bidding farewell to a rather gaudy and girl-ridden free-footedness. Beyond noticing that, I confess that I paid little attention to his forced gaiety. I took him home, and left him with a joke. I went to see him manacled, as promised; but left the gathering early. I was a stranger to most, and the few of his folks who knew me had little use for me. I was one of those fellows of whom he was well rid. The first thing I heard when leaving my lodging the next day was that my pal had celebrated his nuptial night by cutting his throat with a jagged shard of the broken wash-basin. The news stunned me. I felt actually ill until I heard the findings of the examining doctor. Our final evening's carouse could have had no such result; yet there it was—I had helped him to get very drunk, and whatever else people might think I knew many would place blame on me. I was already in ill favour with plenty of people in the close community of little Oxford. Hadn't I been kicked out of my home? When the real truth got around, I still felt sick, but not on my own account. I held up my head so far as my personal connection was concerned. I felt sick that I had not guessed that poor fellow's real reason for getting so wildly drunk the night before he was to marry a clean young girl. The boy was rotten, and knew it, but hadn't the pluck to break off the engagement, least of all to tell the truth. Had I guessed how things were, I would have somehow forced him to break it. I am sure that I would.

The tragedy spoilt my visit. I stayed in the city for a week, trying all the time to make up my mind what to do. There was a little cash left of all I had saved—very little, because I could never refuse a loan, and I remember recovering loaned money from only one man in my life. To save expenses, instead of pub-chasing, I frequented an Institute in St Aldate's, run by College men for the working lads of Oxford. An old Indian Mutiny veteran was resident manager of the place, and a girl friend of his daughter's ran the jam-puff and ginger-beer bar. For the first time since meeting

Agnes McAlpine I found pleasure in the company of a girl who was not in the business of giving pleasure to sailors. She didn't like the sea or sailors very much; but she seemed to like me. She was one of a large family living in one of the St Aldate's crevices; her mother was a dressmaker; I never knew or heard of her father, though she had a sister who was barely walking at that time. I made a set at the old Irish wife of the caretaker, and got permission to take the girl for a walk. When we returned, we had come to an understanding. I would go to London, get work ashore, and when well settled we would marry. Fast work? Perhaps it was; but it was not to be quite as fast as all that.

Some of the shipping companies whose ships had their home port in London employed gangs of men for odd jobs. Seamen were preferred, because the work included shifting ships from dock to dock, to or from dry dock, painting holds, rigging cargo gear, taking the ship as far as the lock when a crew came aboard too full to work. I got a job. Sixpence an hour, and sevenpence-ha'penny overtime. In my gang were a crippled second mate, a steward whose perquisites had seemed too aspiring to more than one skipper, a beer-tank called Hookey, and an ancient who had sailed in East Indiamen and moaned that he saw the finish of British supremacy on the sea in steam, patent windlasses, screw rigging, and steel. We worked at Scruttons, and saw more dock-life from a sober viewpoint than many seamen see in a long life.

The work was hard, for the old hands 'dodged Pompey' shamelessly, and the new hands did their work. The wages permitted little frivolity beyond a few half-pints of four-ale, and that was twopence a pint. I smoked twist tobacco, cut down on my four-ale, and paid what everybody considered a foolish price for lodgings. Fourteen shillings a week I paid, and had a room to myself. Most of the unmarried men in the job doubled up on lodgings and drank more ale. When I happened to meet a work-mate on Sunday, I was chipped all the week following. They vowed I must have money; I was working in the docks for some dark and devious purpose. I never achieved a companionship until I met one Sunday

the ex-steward and his very overpowering wife, dressed as the lilies. I believe it was their habit to avoid meeting men from the gang. But I was dressed as well as they. We had drinks together, and the lady gave me a rolling eye. It ended in my being invited to lodge with them, and I accepted. My own lodgings were none too clean, and I hoped for much better things in the new place. I stayed there for several months, but chiefly on the steward's account. He had his troubles, I could see. The lady liked beer. When there was no money at home for her pub-crawling, she had no scruples about going to her favourite pub and waiting for an invitation. Latterly my room was neglected, and the supper usually had a stale aroma about it. I spoke to the man, and he begged me not to go. When things had gone on a bit farther with no improvement, I spoke to the woman. She again gave me the rolling eye, and made beery love to me, promising to look after me well if I'd look after her. I prepared to leave. Going to my sea-chest to count up my finances, I found the cash-box bare as a baby's hand. Of course I spoke to the man about it, and the poor fellow looked like bursting into tears.

"I'm beat," he moaned. "She always does it. She isn't so bad when somebody's here as when we're alone. Don't go. I'll pay it back a bit a week."

I wondered how bad she was when they had no lodgers; but saying nothing, except that I was going, I shifted my gear down to the Lady Ashburton Home at Custom House, and quit my dock job. I wrote to the girl in Oxford that I had tried but failed to get decent work in London, and was going to sea again, but would surely come home within the year and try to make a fresh start.

For a day or two I was undecided what to do. I had made up my mind never to use those false papers again; but it was hard to keep that resolve, the docks were so full of fine ships. I heard of four second-mate's berths going in one week. The point was decided for me when I heard a ship's carpenter in the Home mention a shipmate by the same name as he whose papers I had bought. It was a common enough name—the coincidence may have been only that—but it put the wind up

me, and I definitely rubbed out London as a port for further ventures under false colours. Another factor was that I met a bedroom steward of the P. & O. in a billiards-room in Tidal Basin, and he told me that the Line was taking on numbers of general servants in the Royal Albert Dock. Mickey Roach's name recurred to me. I asked questions of my billiards companion, and in consequence presented myself next morning before the terrible Mickey.

One glance at Mr Roach convinced me that only the truth would do here. Some of it, of course. I presented my real discharges, and told of my disappointment when faulty vision stopped my deck career. He was gruff as a scorched bosun, but kind. He made me feel the most useless thing on earth, then gave me a chit to go on board the *Oceana* and report to the head waiter as one of the shore staff.

There were a dozen like me, learning the business of stewarding by washing paintwork, scrubbing cabins, and, at midday, being taught how to wait on table by serving a lot of clerks from the office. The washing paintwork came easy to me, so did the scrubbing; but the table work was not so exciting. Some of the lads to whom I handed soup were more used to eating from a paper of fish and chips, and they made the most of having a servant. But I was in the job to make good, and swallowed many a bitter pill before my training was finished. Between times the gang put stores aboard outward-bound liners. I humped sacks of potatoes up interminable gangways, and at last worked my emancipation by showing how smart I was at making slings and working handy-billies in the store-room.

We were paid one pound a week, and had two meals daily, and could, if we liked, sleep aboard one of the ships. Nobody did sleep aboard, so far as I could see, and it was easy to understand why. The glory-hole of a ship in dock is a bleak, cheerless den, and the bare iron bunks were too much like a deserted jail hospital, except in cleanliness. So I stayed at Lady Ashburton's prim hostelry for a month; then came the great day. I got my chit to join the *Shannon*. At the company's store I drew two suits of blue—a thin one and a thick

one—half a dozen jumpers, and a cap. I was given a list of clothes, and warned that the list would be tallied with what I had in my chest; then off I went to Gardiner's Scotch House and spent every shilling I had left on two dozen stiff-fronted white shirts, four dozen collars, some black ties and socks, pyjamas, underwear, etc. Two days later the ship signed on, and off I went, a-stewarding for Bombay, at thirty bob a month and tips!

## CHAPTER XV

### ‘WILY HUNKS’

THE under-stewards in the P. & O. were called ‘wily hunks.’ The saloon waiters were ‘wingers,’ to distinguish them from the bedroom stewards. At 5 A.M. we were roused out of our stuffy, crowded glory-hole. Each man of lesser grade than a superior servant—such as linen steward, store-keeper’s mate, doctor’s or purser’s servant, and so forth—had a vast expanse of scrubbing to do on bended knees. The wingers had to scrub under a table, between chairs, and the alley-way between tables. Others scrubbed the long saloon alleyways. Each man had to keep and guard his own bucket, scrubbing brush, and swab; and there was usually a fight over a lost or stolen bucket. When I learnt the ropes of this new game I bored a hole in my wooden bucket and kept a cork in my overalls. It worked for a while, until every man bored a hole in his bucket; then the second waiter hopped on all hands for destroying the ship’s gear, and other tricks had to be invented. After the scrubbing all the brass had to be polished; then while the day watchmen laid the tables for breakfast, the scrubbers and polishers dressed for the meal. Their own breakfast was eaten standing up before the steam press—porridge and Irish stew one day, porridge and steak the next; and these blazing foods obtained all the voyage, regardless of Red Sea heat or Channel chill.

After the saloon breakfast the wingers changed into working rig again, and did more brasswork, washed paintwork, spruced up generally for the eleven o’clock inspection, when the commander, chief officer, purser, chief steward, and doctor came round and looked for dirt. Tiffin was at one o’clock; and after the dishes and silver were washed up—or strapped up, as they called it—the afternoon was rest time until the hour came for setting the dinner-tables. By the

time dinner was finished and the gear strapped up it was nine o'clock, and except for two lads who had to stand night watch we were off duty. Night watches were divided between bedroom stewards and wingers, one of each every night, and the watch had to be kept after a hard day's work. The watchmen were excused all work before breakfast, but that was their only allowance.

Eating standing up was the greatest trial. Bedroom stewards, who usually 'made' good money, paid the pantry-men to put aside saloon food for them; the rest of us had to scramble in huge pans for what we could get. When dinner was over, all *entrées* were dumped into a pan; potatoes, rice, cauliflower *au gratin*, every kind of thing from sweetbreads to *filet de boeuf* in one nasty mess; but it was in that mess that the tit-bits lurked, and forks flew among the treasure until somebody got pronged, and then there was a plate of wet victuals slapped into the pronger's face, and an invitation to go on the fo'c'sle head. I found the work very tiring, with all my hard schooling in sailing-ships. But I managed to hold up my end somehow.

P. & O. ships were very splendid. There was plenty of brass and gold, colourful Lascars, Sidi-boys, and Zanzibaris. Boat drills and fire drills, dances and concerts, rigid inspections with the purser—or Charley Potter, as all pursers of the line were nicknamed—wearing white gloves and looking for trouble. The bosun was called the 'gunner'; the main-deck the 'gun-deck'; the A.B.s called themselves 'quarter-masters,' and the lad who wrote the *menus* was the 'writer.' There were neither printing-presses, wireless nor sonic sounders in those days at sea.

In the saloon the excellent service which the passengers expected and received was given at a terrible cost of unnecessary grief to the wingers. There was never enough of anything to go round; yet a passenger must have anything he asked for. Dinners were run in courses to the stroke of a gong, and if a winger got behind through having to search other tables for a sauce or a dish of nuts, his table was spotted by the head waiter. Old hands learnt to steal to serve

their tables. So did I. I stole better than any of them in no time.

In the Red Sea young wingers sometimes collapsed. The punkah was the sole means of ventilation, and the fringes hit a lad in the face as he leant over his passengers, flustered him, and in the end broke his spirit. If he needed a jug of ice-water for his table, he must run half the length of the ship for it, duck into a freezing annex to the chill-room, and back into the blazing heat of the pantry and the saloon. No wonder youngsters collapsed. Blue serge suits in the Red Sea! Stiff shirts and collars! Black shoes! And woe betide the sorry winger who dared to put on a dicky over a singlet. Small wonder that faces streamed with sweat, collars fell into folds, and shirts looked like rags before a dinner was over. Then to eat standing over a hot press, in a steaming pantry, with the tremendous pile of dirty table gear staring him in the face as an after-dinner sport—no, a winger’s life was not a happy one on the Bombay run.

Most of the P. & O. men of that day were Masons. They had to be if they expected to get on. There were ‘bung clubs,’ too, run by the saloon barman, and held in the bedroom stewards’ glory-hole, which was a broader, airier place two decks above that of the wingers. But unless you were a Mason, you never got into the bung club. You rarely met a steward in a decent position, heading for a chief stewardship, unless he was a Mason.

Bombay was a joy. I had made five pounds in tips in three weeks coming out, and when translated into rupees it came to a lot of money. I had never noticed this in Calcutta, because there I still had money from the St Paul venture and never counted my dibs. But in Bombay we had good times. Elephanta Caves and Crawford Market and Malabar Hill for our minds’ sake; Watson’s or Passenger’s Hotel for our billiards, gin and tonic, and iced beer. Sometimes Grant Road for spicier sport. Grant Road was a revelation to me, who was no novice in the methods of port ladies. One took a gharry at Victoria Dock or Apollo Bunder and drove to Cammattipoorra to run the gamut of the houses. At the



top end were the cheaper places, with native girls. The farther you drove along the classier the houses got; and from top to bottom the game was to hang on to your hat, cap, or topee, for the girls ran after the gharry trying to snatch a hat, on the assumption that where the hat went the man must follow.

I went after my topee half-way down the road, but I didn't stay. In the hall I saw a topee which I knew very well, since I had been sent to Mazagon to fetch it that same day. It had a green puggaree. Somehow I found myself back in the gharry with the green-puggareed topee instead of my own.

I wore it next day when I went to ask the purser for two days' leave, and got the leave.

When I returned on board the purser sent for me.

"Young man," he said, "you're a smart lad. So smart that I'm sure you'll get on." I swelled up. I wasn't a Mason, nor did I ever expect to be one. I might have joined that happy band had I been more in love with log-rolling; but the idea of joining something simply for what was to be got out of it didn't appeal to me. Wasn't I right? Here was the powerful Charley Potter giving me a start because I was smart enough to recognize his hat in a place out of bounds.

"Yes, my lad, you'll get on," he said. "Take this chit up to the office in Mazagon, then see the chief steward when you get back."

I had signed on in London at thirty shillings a month, which was the P. & O. rate of wages for first voyagers. Usually the wages were increased by ten shillings a month each voyage, until the maximum of three pounds was reached. If I had earned promotion so soon, quite possibly I would get my rise without waiting to complete the voyage. The Mazagon office looked cool and inviting. Already my ambitions soared. Perhaps I would one day sit in that office and manage things. The man to whom I handed my chit gave me a keen glance, and nodded his head. He wrote something, blotted it, and handed it to me.

"I'm told you're smart," he said quietly. "Don't be too

smart, or you'll last a very short time in this company. See your chief steward."

Outside, I quickly ripped open the note, for I had sensed something not so good in that man's quiet manner. The chit was my transfer to the *Sutlej*. Then I knew! All the passage out I had heard the boys talking about station ships—old steamers no longer good enough for a regular run, kept on the coast, their crews bound for a year, running on the Bombay Aden ferry, the Shanghai run, or to Yokohama; always back to Bombay.

And the wages—I looked again. Thirty shillings a month!

As I sought the chief steward to hand in my news, I passed the purser.

"All right?" he inquired placidly.

"*Bohut acchee!* Very good!" I returned with a grin. No use letting him see that he'd scored. "I'm much obliged to you, sir. It's just what I've been hoping for."

Senior stewards, and young officers, sometimes commanders, went into the station ships for experience. Among the 'wily hunks' it was the hard cases who went there—lads who had been smart, old soldiers who could do their work but always chewed the rag about it, malcontents who were Masons and so were given further chances before getting the sack. More than half the waiters, and all the officers' servants, were natives from Goa; in the small station ships white and brown wingers shared one glory-hole. That was not quite pleasant, but there were compensations. One thing which wasn't much more pleasant was that in the P. & O. at that time—up to the wreck of the *China*, in fact—there were no messrooms for the officers in their ships. All the officers from chief to junior sat at table with the passengers. They were all allowed wine money, I was told, and could drink all the whisky and soda they cared to buy. It was disagreeable to have to wait upon some young squirt just out of his training ship. Most of them came from Devitt and Moore's ships, after a couple of years in either the *Conway* or the *Worcester*, and to them all other seamen were vulgar fellows. One youngster in the *Sutlej* had been in the *Hesperus* when I made my voyage and

a half in her, and I got him at my table, of course. It took all my courage to refrain from reminding him, when he ordered me about, that I had seen him getting a terrific wiggling from old Corner for keeping his bunk filthy.

But life went on. Half a dozen voyages to Aden and back, then round to Shanghai twice, cut a big hole in my year. I learnt to take orders and sling hash; I could open champagne without blowing somebody's eye out, and when it came to scrubbing I shone like a charring star. Many times I was fed up; many times I determined to get back where I belonged and make the fullest use of those purchased papers. Why should I be a waiter when I might command? It took a lot of hard thinking to persuade me to carry on. Then came the day when a batch of us were ordered to join the *Caledonia* to return to London. Perhaps I'd get a better deal in the next ship. If something like a storekeeper's job came my way I'd be satisfied.

In London I found what seemed to be my chance. The ex-P. & O. liner *Ceylon* was being run by the Polytechnic of Regent Street as a public yacht. You know the sort of thing—thirteen guineas, all in, for a thirteen-day cruise to the Norwegian fjords. A cousin of my chemist of Oxford, Mr Jessup, was chief steward of the *Ceylon*. I went on board her, and on the strength of a year in the P. & O. got the job of deck steward. Great! One of the plums of wily hunking! It was a sort of Sodom plum. The ship was temperance. Fancy a bar where only Bovril and soft drinks were served! Deck' stewards always made a sack of money, so I heard. About all I did was to help fat old women along the deck, carry Bovril to the smoking-room and tea to the ladies' saloon, and steer cuspidors wherever needed. No wonder I landed that job! But I stuck it for a dozen cruises, the last one being to the Holy Land, then back I trekked to London and saw Mickey Roach again.

He gave me plenty of hell for leaving the Company. I told him I had not been well since my year in the East. Quite kindly he sent me to the shore staff again to wait for a ship, and at the end of a month I was shipped across to Belfast,

‘ WILY HUNKS ’

with a lot more hunks, to prepare the new liner *China* for the Australian run. As soon as I saw that fine ship I renewed all my resolutions to remain a steward and make good. The glory-hole was light, spanking clean new, and, being the first to join, we had choice of bunks. All was well.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A WRECK AND A RESOLVE

**S**PLENDID as was the *China*, wily hunking was much the same as in other ships. There was more brasswork to clean, and the mahogany needed much polishing; there was a terrific amount of plate, which had to be cleaned once a week, and that was done after the long and tedious dinner. As in smaller ships, there was never enough gear or small dishes to go round; but I had learnt the game thoroughly, and served my table well. My mate on the table was Harry Kaul, who had been an apprentice in a sailing-ship, but one voyage had been enough for him, and he preferred slinging hash. His eyesight was as keen as a vulture's, too. I felt angry with him; but we got along swimmingly, and it was comforting to be able to share a yarn with a sailing-ship man. Three voyages to Sydney I made in the *China*. She was the darling of Circular Quay, and for a steamer she was a fine vessel. The Railway Pier at Melbourne was thronged with people to look us over; Circular Quay seethed with visitors; the Orient liner was neglected utterly. We had carried a lot of important passengers on our maiden voyage; every steward had 'made' money. Sydney knew it during the three weeks we lay there. I tried again to find Agnes McAlpine, but could not . . . I wish I had.

On one or other of the three voyages the *China* carried notable people. Harry Furness I remember. I had until my most recent wreck a signed sketch of his. Shand and Boucicault, Ada Willoughby and Béatrice Lamb of theatrical fame; Admiral Seymour and Captain Jellicoe; and, on the third and disastrous voyage, Mr and the Hon. Mrs Freeman-Thomas—the present Lord and Lady Willingdon.

Chiefly, however, the *China*'s voyages were notable because of their effect upon my career. Whenever I grew disgruntled, Kaul persuaded me to stick to it. He insisted that if we carried on as we were going we must attract notice. Harry Kaul was a

Mason. Perhaps he had seen some writing on the wall which was invisible to me.

Early in 1898 we sailed from Sydney for London. It was an interesting route we followed. There was no Panama Canal then; our run was by way of Hobart, Melbourne, Adelaide, Albany, Colombo, Aden, the Suez ports, Malta, Brindisi, Marseilles, Gibraltar, and thence direct to London. Voyages occupied about four months, and were full enough of variety for anybody. But sometimes variety crept in of another sort. On that third voyage we took on board in Colombo a dipsomaniac in a bad way. We had one with us already. As soon as we got to sea, these two queer fellows learnt about each other and took a violent mutual dislike. Each called the other loudly a drunken sot. One would reach his table first, and the other would walk right round the saloon to avoid having to pass him. It was very funny. Before we reached Aden it was not so funny. They started stalking each other round the main deck with pistols; so we poor wily hunks must needs go stalking them. Until we got them into one alley-way together it was much like stalking a couple of tigers with walking-sticks. But when they came face to face, at a distance of thirty feet, each dropped his gun and ran like a deer. The danger had been only imaginary. We clapped them under control, and I personally saw them no more.

We called at Aden and left there on March 24th, 1898. A stiff gale had hounded us up from Colombo, March had been a stormy month, but the 24th brought fine weather. The date was also that of the birthday of the most popular lady on board, Mrs Freeman-Thomas. There were to be great doings that evening. Champagne was served in the saloon; we sweated between meals arranging the hurricane-deck for the fancy-dress dance to follow. The tale of that day has been told often, years ago, when the happening was fresher in men's minds perhaps. It is still fresh in my memory, since I was the last man of the crew to leave the ship—after standing by the wreck for thirteen weeks. Perhaps I may add a bit to the records.

The passage into the Red Sea from the eastward is called Hell Gate. The P. & O. Company were very strict in

their rules concerning that passage. They called for extreme vigilance. My table in the saloon was next to the captain's, so I had a good opportunity of knowing something of what happened though I was not on deck. It was the custom of the officer of the watch to send down to the commander each evening at 8 o'clock a report of the ship's situation. On this evening the quartermaster brought down the report as usual, and seeing that the ship was expected to enter the strait about this time that report was more important than usual. Captain De Horne received the chit, and remained chatting to his table passengers. Obviously, then, the chit reported nothing disquieting. Yet, when he left the saloon at ten-past eight, the ship must have been in a bad spot, for at thirteen minutes past eight she struck with terrific force and came to a stop.

A steward at the fore-end of the saloon, who must have been almost over the spot where the rock pierced the ship's hull, dropped a pile of plates and flung up his hands, yelling :

"She's on the rocks! She's on the rocks!"

That was "Mary Ann" Owens, and he lived up to his nickname. But otherwise there was little confusion. The head waiter, Jolliffe, called out that there was no danger; Kaul and I stepped into the alley-way, obstructing a minor rush, passed on the head waiter's assurance, and carried on clearing our table and folding up the tablecloth. A few passengers rushed the stairs, but altogether the saloon was emptied in an orderly manner. The engines were at full speed astern, and the ship trembled violently; but the engines were soon stopped, for a harsh and ominous tearing and crashing underfoot gave warning that if she backed off she might founder in deep water. Stewards had run round the main-deck, closing the watertight doors. Above, rockets were sent up, for the homeward-bound flagship of the Australian station was supposed to be not far behind us. There was, of course, no wireless then. It was found later on, when the divers went down, that the ship had run upon a sharp peak of rock on Azalea Reef; her impetus had carried her high over it, until her weight crashed her down and spitted her like a herring. The rock penetrated her for a height of thirteen feet, crushing the orlop- and main-decks together. But

that was not known at the time of the wreck. There were 420 men in the crew, and nearly five hundred passengers—most of them in the flimsiest of fancy dress—and for that hour at any rate nobody knew but that the ship was doomed to founder. Azalea Reef has the bones of many ships. There is deep water very close at hand.

When the saloon was cleared, we who had remained there ran round the main-deck state-rooms and closed all the ports. Anyone with burglarious proclivities could have made a rich haul there, for dressing-tables and bunks were strewn with watches, pocket-books, and other negotiable valuables, thrown aside in the changing into fancy dress. As far as I know, none of that stuff was picked up until a party under the chief steward came aboard the next day to collect and record it.

On deck the night was as black as the inside of a cow; there was little wind, and the sea was only moderately rough; but it was near to the breaking of the monsoon and the weather might change at any time. Boats had been swung out, and some were away when we reached the boat-deck. It says much for the P. & O. methods that all the boats were in the water and away from the ship in twenty minutes from the moment of her striking. One boat, I think under Mr Beevor, the chief officer, went away on the wrong side of the ship and never came back to the islet of Little Perim until next day. That shows how dark it was. The ship lay within a hundred feet of the rocks.

At the boats there was little or no confusion. I had the privilege of handing Mrs Freeman-Thomas into her boat, and her husband stood aside like a man while his wife was separated from him, until all the women and children belonging to that boat were safely embarked. Only one man in that boat's company showed haste—a fat priest, who, when I prevented him forcing his way to the gangway, burst forth into harsh threats of what he'd tell the Company. He even threatened to report me for smoking at such a time. I remember well how that argument was settled. I was handing down a big state-room water-can full of fresh water. I jammed the spout hard into the fat little man's stomach, and he had not recovered his wind when he was put into the boat five minutes later.



There was no more bother. Except for the missing boat, which turned up at daybreak, all the boats landed their people on the rocks, and the seamen and Lascars made shelters out of boat sails. The expected cruiser turned up, read our signals, and, assured that our lives were safe, steamed back to Aden for assistance. Next day the *Carthage* came along and took off our people. In the boat to which I belonged a German doctor's wife gave birth to a baby, and, to the best of my belief, that was the only shipwreck whose survivors outnumbered the wrecked company.

However, this is not an account of the wreck of the *China* only. After the passengers and most of the ship's company had embarked in the *Carthage*, Captain De Horne mustered those of us who remained, and thanked us for our behaviour. Poor old fellow! He was an old servant of the firm, and was to be superannuated after this voyage. The negligence, if no worse, of somebody on deck at 8 P.M. that night broke him. I think Lord Brassey did something for him, but he didn't live long.

At the end of a week orders had come from the Company by way of Aden. Three quartermasters, nine stewards, half a dozen native firemen and cooks, and three deck and engineer officers were to remain to watch the Company's interests pending the arrival from England of a salvage outfit, and the rest of the crew were to go home. It was necessary to keep keen watch; for there was gold in the strong-room and valuable mails; on the one coast were Somalis, on the other Arabs, and pretty soon they began to sneak around us. For the first week we were busy collecting loose valuables and securing them. Then thirteen thousand cases of Tasmanian apples began to go bad, and we threw them overboard with all the fresh meat in the freezer, which was no longer operating. In two days the rocks were two feet deep in rotten apples, and the flies descended on us in millions. Sharks came for the meat, and the sea thereafter was alive with them. I have still agonizing memories of my rock-broken ankles, fly-blown and poisoned to a depth of my thumb-knuckle.

Also in the cargo were tea, hides, copper ore; the sea-water

acting upon them created a terrific stench and gas which turned white paint black. We lived on the rocks, afraid of the gases as well as of the possibility of the ship slipping off and sinking. Two men at a time kept night watch, patrolling the ship. Our food had to be rummaged for in the store-room at low tide; and, the issue-room having been stocked just before the ship struck, we fared well for shipwrecked mariners. At the end of three weeks other orders came by a small steamer from Aden, and we were mustered again. Consequently two officers, a native cook and officer's boy, and three white stewards were to stand by, and the rest go home. This time volunteers were asked for. There was no telling how long a stay was certain. If the ship broke up—no mere figment of the imagination if it came on to blow—the stay would be short. If she stuck there until the salvage company took charge, the volunteers would remain until some definite decision was reached regarding the possibility of salving her. Alongside us, in plain sight, were the wrecks of the *Azalea* and the *Hong-kong*. The sea was never bare of sharks; the middle distance was rarely bare of small boats lurking ever in hope.

A brainwave came to me. If I stood by and showed my loyalty to the Company, perhaps something would come my way in reward, for all that I was not a Mason. I stood forward. When the little steamer left us there remained, besides the hands above mentioned, the three stewards, Gerry Harden, Rowthorne, and I.

Ten more weeks. Blazing heat and lashing seas. After the first burst of the monsoon weather we returned on board, feeling that she could never slide off for all the salvage ships afloat. I believe rain has never fallen in that region. We never saw any. Our water was stale, and our food ran short. One foray into the issue-room between gales produced a box of *haricots verts* and a case of champagne. They had to last us three days before we dared go down again. One day we sailed the lifeboat that had been left us over to the Somali coast, taking a lot of brass fittings to trade for meat. We got two sheep, with fat tails and little else. I could carry both under my arms easily.

But it was all the meat we ever got that way, for shortly afterwards the salvagers appeared. I think they were Swedish. There were women in the crews—cooks and deck-hands—and Gerry Harden got into trouble the first night. But they had stores for us, and we welcomed them.

To shorten a long yarn, at the end of thirteen weeks the little native steamer *Hornet* showed up with letters for our officers. She brought also a chief steward to take charge. The divers had been blasting the rock beneath the ship, and had blown away as much of her plating as rock. They seemed to be not very sanguine. But our job was up. We were to go home, unless one of us cared to stay on with Peard, the new steward. I felt that I had done enough. The two others who were with me were 'superior servants' and kept to themselves. I was fairly lonely all on my own. Besides, there was no tobacco. We embarked in the *Hornet* and proceeded up the Red Sea to Jiddah for a load of pilgrims. The captain was a chatty fellow, and from him we heard that the divers had said the ship was hopeless. Later we learnt that they had even laid charges round her to blow her up, making the salvage ships fast to her overnight; and that there was an abnormal tide that night and she floated off, only being saved from sinking by the ships lashed fast to her. Whether or not that is the fact, I do know that at the end of another three months after we left her, she left Perim under her own steam, with a timber and cement patch over the hole, and reached Belfast at an average speed of five knots. She was running in the P. & O. service for a long time afterwards. A fine old ship, the *China*, and the only steamer which holds a place in my regard along with the darlings of sail.

The *Hornet* took us to Aden, where we got money and clothes from the P. & O. office, and were given rooms at the Hotel d'Europe. Old Ali, the big and pleasant robber in charge, looked after us like a father. He shaved us without losing our friendship, which will explain much, since we all had beards and had not known a fresh-water wash for almost three months. The Manchester Regiment up at Chum-Chum gave us the freedom of the sergeants' mess—and made no distinction be-

tween 'superior servants' and humble winger. We had a roaring time until the *Egypt* picked us up and carried us to London.

I went to see Mickey Roach, determined to strike the iron while hot. Mickey was no longer there. A new man sat in his chair; and in five minutes I knew that my old friend Charley Potter of the *Shannon* was bound to strangle me with that green puggaree.

"You can go in the *Shannon*," said Mr Sharpe. "She's going on station. There's nothing else."

"But I've just spent thirteen weeks on a wreck," I protested.

"You volunteered, didn't you?" An airy wave of the hand, then: "Take it, my lad. It's the best I can offer you. If you watch yourself it may be a good thing for you."

I went out and got drunk. I rarely drank too much, but when I believed myself injured I went the whole hog. There was a letter from my brother, who was in the Channel Islands. He said something about Father weeping when my letters went to the house, but not for him. The brother very decently suggested that I write to Father, even if I did not go home. I thought it over, had another drink, and decided that if the old man wanted to see me he could tell me so himself. He had kicked me out.

I went down to the dock in the morning. Harry Kaul was one of the first men I met, and he said he was joining the *Shannon* as a bedroom steward, which was the first step to promotion. Seeing Kaul there decided me. I wasn't going to potter about in little ships to satisfy another man's grudge; but I meant to get out East, and quit the ship. I'd sail again under those purchased papers, in ships that never came home. I wrote to the girl in Oxford, advising her to forget me, then joined the saucy *Shannon* for the second time. I was still a winger, but my pay was at least raised to three pounds a month.

Towards the end of the summer we sailed. As we watched the lights slide by in the Channel, Harry Kaul said to me just as we turned to go below:

"You ought to have come home with us. All hands got something better. You were forgotten, sticking out there on

that wreck. And you ought to be a Mason, too. I've been promised a barman's berth after this voyage."

"Good luck to you, and a cork in your eye!" I retorted. "You play bung clubs, and passwords, and get your barman's job. I'll buy drinks at your bar yet, old socks! I'm going to look for a man's job."

## CHAPTER XVII

### FREE AGAIN

JUST after leaving Marseilles a woman at my table came to dinner very drunk. She was a very lovely woman of less than thirty, travelling alone, and apparently fair game for amorous males. Up to a certain point her heavy drinking only enhanced her allure; but that evening she had taken several over the eight, and her red lips were slack. Her dress was loose, too; her shoulder-straps kept slipping as she took her seat; a strap fell far down her arm and a breast popped over her *corsage*. She only laughed, popped it back, and asked me to pull up her strap. I made little of the job, but she began to draw attention to my gallant efficiency, asking the other people at the table to notice my brown eyes. Once I ignored it; twice I let it pass; reiteration infuriated me, for not only did the people laugh, watching me until I became clumsy at the table, but constant comment on my eyes reminded me that but for those same eyes I'd be no flunkey but an officer, perhaps even master, with a place in a chair, instead of behind several. The woman ordered wine, again calling me Brown Eyes. I opened the bottle, leant over her, and emptied most of a quart right down between her breasts. Some men laughed, but she was mad. I was reported, and lost my table. For the rest of the passage I had to wash dishes, losing all chance of making a shilling over my pay.

In resentment I gave up trying to please. I let my beard grow, and in a week I looked like a bushranger. One day at boat stations the captain gave me a hauling over for my dirty appearance, and I told him that nothing in the Articles forbade whiskers. He told the purser to keep an eye on me, and I knew that my finish in the P. & O. was in sight. It pleased me. I'd have no trouble now in getting my discharge in Bombay.

When I was humping luggage on arriving in Bombay, my

champagne lady saw me. I was bent under her trunk, covered with whiskers, but she knew me. She was sober, and really looked like a lovely decent woman. I tried to avoid her, but when I had put the trunk into the sling she was there at my elbow.

"I'm so sorry," she said quietly. "I don't blame you for what you did. It was my fault entirely. Please take this."

She pressed something into my fist, and ran down the gangway. It was two sovereigns she had given me. I forgave her long before that, because through her I saw my emancipation ahead. I blew her a kiss over the rail, and she laughed up at me.

I asked for my discharge, but that apparently was not P. & O. fashion. I was told I could go home immediately, and pay off in London. They refused to pay me off in India. I figured up my pay, and it came to about what the champagne lady had given me. That was too much to throw away, for I was not too strong financially. I asked whether I must go home if I chose to carry on, and was told that I could serve out my time in the ship if I behaved myself, but must look for no advancement. The head waiter, who carried the decision to me from the chief steward, licked his thick lips as he uttered the words "behave yourself." He didn't like me, nor did I like him. If I stayed by the ship, he knew he was sure of a scapegoat for whatever might go adrift. I hated the prospect, but I did want money, and, on station, wages were paid every three months at the Mazagon office. I said I'd stay.

"Better shave, then," said the head waiter silkily.

"I can't shave. I've got a skin trouble which will break out if I cut myself," I told him.

"Then you'll get no table."

"To hell with the table. Make me store-keeper's mate."

I thought that a keen suggestion; but store-keeper's mate was a job to be sought after. There was beer and a peg of whisky very often in that job. What I got was a double whack of dishwashing, and pantries in steamers on the Indian coast are no cool retreats. Harry Kaul blamed me for throwing away my chances; but I never had a chance after finding Charley Potter's green-puggareed topee.

The three months were nearly up, and pay was in sight, when the first bit of luck came my way. The head waiter had never ceased hounding me. I forget his name, but I don't believe he ever forgot mine. When the passengers had left us in Aden, and the wily hunks were in leisurely fashion clearing up the saloon and cabins in the dim coolth, he unearthed a job for me which proved his genius. On the boat-deck, above the awnings, was the big saloon skylight, and its brass was green with spray, the glass salt-encrusted. Any other steward in the Line would have asked the chief officer for Lascars to do that job; but I was for it. I went to work in the white heat of Aden, determined now to carry on until the three-months pay-day. I wanted no trouble, nor did I seek it. I obeyed the order without comment. But that was not enough. Up the man came, after an hour, and started ragging me over the speed at which I worked. Then I stood up, mildly remonstrated, and tackled the work again. He shoved against me, murmuring something about Brown Eyes, and that spilt it. What exactly happened is a blurred memory. I know that for a moment my brown eyes refused to function; I hit the man on the chin, not hard, but effectively, for he backed away, tripped against the skylight coaming, pitched through the glass, and landed on a saloon table twenty feet below. He said I threw him down.

I got fourteen days in Aden jail for that. Defence was futile. I was a notorious trouble-maker. Everybody knew that. I ate curry and rice for fourteen days, and learnt to like it. I drank distilled water, and considered it good. My cell was cool and dark. Solitude never worried me. I had lots of time to plan my future; and on my release, going to the office, I found that my pay had been left there for me and I was clear of the Company.

That was luck. I celebrated it by visiting the sergeants' mess and found that I was not such a bad lot after all. Tommy Atkins was never the lad to boot a man when he's down.

I had a fine beard by now, and could look forward with confidence. My portmanteau had been dumped ashore with me, and I had all my gear except a few bits of waiter's uniform which I was well content to forget. In a few days a steamer called for coal, and I got a job as deckhand as far as Rangoon.



The second mate had once sailed in the *City of Hankow*, though not with me; it was, however, a point of contact which sailing-ship men will appreciate, and he got the Old Man to give me a letter of recommendation when I left the steamer in Rangoon. That letter was useful.

The day I landed in Rangoon I went on board a barque, the *Lady Elise*, seeking any sort of berth for a fresh start. The vessel was untidy, dirty with all the dirt of port, but she had an air of class that attracted me. She was laden, but I saw few men aboard her as I straddled her rail, and I was hopeful. My highest hope had been to get a fo'c'sle job in which I might make myself indispensable, so that when the chance came I'd be on the spot and able to seize it. Up at the customs house I had heard that she was bound for Durban with rice, and that was one thing in her favour, for I decidedly did not want any ship that plied to England at present. I looked for the mate, and the man I addressed proved to be the master.

"Are you wanting hands, sir?" I asked politely. Captain Grove looked me over queerly. I suppose I was a bit overdressed for a swab seeking a fo'c'sle berth out East. I hurried to show him my discharges, and again he looked me over, this time with interest. For a moment I felt a qualm. Had he known the real owner of my papers?

"You've been mate?" he queried. "What have you been doing since this last discharge?"

"I was some time in Calcutta, sir, trying work ashore."

"This letter——" He flipped the steamer captain's reference. "What were you doing in Aden?" He was a keen one, was Grove.

"I was on my way home, sir, but got scared of the winter and decided to come East again," I said, civilly.

"H'm!" he grunted. He walked athwartships, and came back to where I stood feeling none too easy. But I had no need to fear him. "I'm hung up here for a mate," he said. "I've got an old second mate who'll never be anything else. Where's your dunnage?"

In that little barque I found myself again. It may sound fishy, but it was true. All my life I had resented Fate, Luck,

call it what you will, which first of all robbed me of a decent education and childhood, and later forced me into devious ways in order that I might follow the bent of my ambition, which was to reach some far higher plane than I had been born upon. Because I knew that I had the ability, I never experienced more than fleeting trepidation concerning my false colours, and never while performing my duty. The sad part of it all was that I had proved absolutely to my own satisfaction that but for the accident of faulty vision there were no heights to which I could not have aspired at sea. Sometimes, when I reflected that sooner or later I must come a cropper, I felt bitter about it.

For the present I came no cropper. We discharged our rice in Durban, went up to Mauritius, and loaded sugar for Adelaide. There was no cargo for us in Adelaide, so off we sailed in ballast to try for a cargo of copra in the Pacific. Captain Grove was a quiet man, who rarely bothered with the ship's work; a good master to sail with. I thought sometimes he looked ill, but he never failed to take his sights or to keep his reckoning. I had been six months with him when we secured a cargo of copra at Tonga and sailed for San Francisco. We also took with us a man and his wife, as passengers. They had the Old Man's room, and, of course, signed on the Articles, since we were not licensed to carry passengers as such. The woman signed on as stewardess, and the man as doctor. That was funny. These people had been trying the simple life in Tonga, but the woman was going to have a baby pretty soon, and she wanted civilization. I had small love for a woman in a sailing-ship, since poor Mrs Hill had come to grief; and still less did I feel happy when I saw the woman come aboard, for to me she looked extremely likely to be brought into the straw before we reached port.

To crown all, we ran into a lot of light winds and made slow progress. It seemed as if the woman really had brought bad luck. Then, after nearly forty days of little more than drifting, when we had reached the bare expanse of ocean between Hawaii and Fanning Island, we ran into a real Pacific snorter; that was the time the woman chose to bring forth her young.

It deserves a chapter to itself.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DEAD MAN'S SHOES

THE breeze had been light from the S.S.E., the sky true blue for two days, when, without any visible change in the weather, the barometer fell sharply. Of course I reported it, and Grove came on deck. He glanced all round, asked my opinion, and without waiting to hear it suddenly ordered me to shorten sail.

"Strip her down to topsails and reefed foresail, mister. We'll take no chances."

The men joked about it, for the sky and sea were smiling; the breeze would not have blown out a candle. But we got sail off her, and furled everything securely. When I left the men coiling up the gear, and went back on the poop, I saw the barometer had dropped almost half an inch. There was also a subtle change in the sky, which was still blue, but metallic blue. A little williwaw of wind came over the sea and flirted up a bucketful of spray. The helmsman got a swift kick in the ribs from the wheel spokes, which woke him out of his dreams. Then all seemed serene again, until the captain appeared all lashed up in hard-weather gear and looking serious.

"You'd better get parcelled up, mister. We're in for a spell of wet," he said.

When I went on deck after putting on my oilskins, the sky was no longer blue, but a dirty dark grey; the wind, still S.S.E., whined and puffed in little squalls. The men came and went about the forecabin, lashing themselves up with spunyarn, talking in subdued tones. The Chinese cook and the carpenter hammered shutters fast against the galley openings; and when that was done I took Chips with me and we looked well to the hatch wedges. The passengers still sat in their chairs on the poop, though their awning had been taken in while I was below. The man looked scared at the preparations going forward, but

the woman appeared totally unaware, or indifferent. The sea was still smooth, and the grey had not yet entirely overrun the sun.

Half an hour of this, then the first real squall came whistling along, and flung the ship over until her scuppers spouted. She came up again immediately, and we were thankful that the job of making her snug was done before that squall struck her. Captain Grove advised the passengers to go below, and they went, the woman complaining that it was hot below. I watched her go, and at once ran forward to lend her a hand, but she needed no help though she was walking heavily. To me she seemed to have grown to an astonishing size in the past few days. I was glad to see her safely off the deck.

In a very short time it was blowing hard, the sea had got up and we were scudding before it, or with the wind a bit on the starboard quarter. Every now and then the barque rooted, and filled her main-deck to the pin-rails, but altogether she was making pretty good weather of it. Captain Grove went below to see if the passengers were comfortable, and by the time he returned the wind had risen to a whole gale, the sea was tremendous, and the barometer had fallen to 29 inches, and was still falling. I suggested that we might do better heave-to. We'd have to heave-to sooner or later.

"That woman will be easier, sir," I hinted.

"It's the woman I'm thinking about," he said gloomily. "I wish to heaven she'd taken any ship but mine! I'm going to carry on as long as possible, and try to land her in Honolulu before she falls apart."

Towards night we were under lower topsails and reefed foresail, with foretopmast stay-sail, and taking seas over both rails as she rolled. The barometer was down to 28.80, and every gust of wind seemed harder than the one before. The men ate their supper in the galley, for the fo'c'sle had been cleaned out by a sea while a man was in the open door.

Just about this time the steward came up all flustered and called the skipper below. I guessed what that meant. I was about to follow him, to ask again if I might heave-to; but before I had taken two steps a sea lifted high over the rail in

the waist and crashed aboard us all along our length. Men came tumbling out of the galley in panic; the galley itself, a steel structure set upon the deck and lashed to ringbolts with chain, burst two lashings and slewed round, half capsized, and tore off a corner of the main-hatch. The sea poured below. I started along, bawling for all hands; and the Old Man came up, all red face and glaring eyes.

"For God's sake, mister, go below and see if you can help that woman!" he gasped. "I daren't do it!"

"The hatch is burst open!" I shouted. "She's taking water."

"I'll see to that! You go and play midwife. Her husband's wringing his hands and praying, and the kid's in sight!"

I choked at the fumes of copra and stirred bilge in the saloon. The paraffin lamps added to the reek. The door of the Old Man's room was on the hook, and the steward pottered about in his pantry like a palsied lunatic.

"Rustle up all the disinfectant you've got, and bring me plenty of hot water and old sheets," I told him. I had seen a baby born in the *China's* wreck, and had a notion of what ought to be done; but I was not in love with the job, nor did I believe the woman would let me try to help her. I opened the door without knocking, after flinging my wet oilskins and sou'wester into my own berth. The man sat on the settee, his head in his hands, awfully seasick, praying like a mission nigger at a revival meeting.

"Cut that out and lend me a hand," I said roughly, shaking him. "Pray if you must, but do something useful besides."

With the ship's difficult motion it was not easy to secure the woman in the bunk, for she rolled from side to side helplessly. She was game enough, and seconded my orders to her husband, so I hoped for the best. I wedged her with pillows, her knees against the ship's side and her back against the leeboard. With the steward's broom I made a hold-on bar at her head, and placed the medicine-chest at the foot of the bunk for her to shove against. Then, while the man was getting the disinfectant which the steward was mixing, I made a quick examination, feeling like a damned fool but encountering no

protest from the woman. From the little I knew about the job things seemed to be going pretty much according to Cocker. Once I realized that it was a case of me or no doctor, I felt no more qualms about it. The woman helped too. She kept telling me how she felt, and of course she had read up and asked advice in expectation of the event. The man came in, placed his disinfectant in the washbowl, and that was the moment the woman uttered a squeal. At once he flopped down on the settee, and started praying harder than ever. Overhead I could hear the thunder of canvas and the clashing of gear. I knew by the changed motion that the ship was being brought to the wind after having sail reduced to bare main lower topsail. But my job was at hand, and I could not bother about the ship.

When next I took a peep, I saw something like one end of a coconut in the centre of a big, round, tight-skinned swelling which certainly looked to me as if it must burst. It gave me a terrific scare; and for a moment I was flustered. I told the man to get me a warmed blanket. He got up, holding on to the settee, calling on God but making no effort to obey my orders. The woman gave a sharp cry, and that finished the man. He blundered to the bunk and gripped the leeboard with both hands.

"God help her! God help her!" he babbled.

"If you want to leave this job to God, I've had enough of it! If you want me to carry on, get that blanket," I told him. "Which is it to be?"

Still praying, he went stumbling out. Like many others who pray, he was not brave enough to depend on prayer when more practical human aid threatened to quit. He left the door swinging on its hinges, and I had to hook it; when next I looked at the woman the baby's head had appeared. It was fat, and shapeless as a bag pudding, and it looked as if it must surely strangle from the constriction around its neck. I knew the importance of disinfectants, and, while uncertain what to do next, swabbed the infant's face and mouth with a bit of well-saturated wadding. I knew nothing then about changing the woman's position, but luckily this proved an easy launching, and while I took from the husband the warmed blanket, folding

it ready to drop the child into, things happened in the bunk. The woman squealed again, and the shoulders of the baby appeared, then the whole birth seemed to be complete in one lengthy spasm, and the woman relaxed. The old memory worked well; I lashed the cord to her leg with a bit of twine, so as not to lose it, put a seizing around the cord close to the infant with a bit of disinfected wool, and cut it with scissors. The man took the babe in the warm blanket and sat down to talk to it, looking as silly as a man could look. The steward came in with more hot water, and I made the two of them carry the infant to the pantry and wash it in the sink.

"Don't handle it as if it would break!" I told them. "Give it a proper washing off, and wrap it in the blanket. If it won't yell, slap it. When it's howling like a real kid, bring it to Mama and she'll feed it, I expect."

Waiting for Nature to clean up the job, I covered the woman up, and gave her a peg of rum. She gave me in return a pallid grin.

"Is it a boy?" she asked.

"Damned if I know, ma'am," I said. Across the saloon, above all the racket of the labouring ship, I heard a lusty yell. "Whatever it is, it's a howling success," I assured her.

It was a boy, and the father wanted to give it one of my names. The mother was weakly insistent too, but I would have none of that. What name? I gruffly bade them leave me out of it, and when I saw that there was plenty of natural food for the kid I left it and the mother in the father's care and put on my storm gear again. I could do nothing more below; the job was done and washed up, and anyhow I wanted the Old Man to look it over and resume charge. He'd have to enter it in the log, and I wanted him to satisfy himself that my part had been performed at least to the best of our resources.

"Are you sure—there's no—isn't there some fear of complications—a sort of *after* sort of thing?" the Old Man stammered, when I reported to him.

"All away and swabbed up, sir," I told him. "I want you to take a look and enter it in the log before any possible complications do crop up."

He went below. I heard him coughing nervously.

The ship lay easy, though the gale blew stronger than ever. Much water had entered through the broken hatch, and the men wearily turned the pumps. The damage had been repaired; the galley was relashed in place; the sky was black enough, and the seas came rolling up from the south'ard with plenty of weight in them; but little water came on board; the barque lifted and rolled easily, sweeping a few points to leeward, and up the same amount until her narrow bit of sail shivered. She was as safe as we could make her, and before midnight the pumps sucked.

The gale blew out next afternoon, and a fresh breeze settled in the north-west quarter, which shifted scarcely at all for a week. Our passengers declined an offer to set them ashore in Honolulu, and we made fast time to the coast. They were speedily recovering from the double event of storm and child-bed and the woman was about on deck so soon that I doubted her wisdom and spoke to her about it.

"Poor man," she laughed, "if all that Jason says is true, you had a much harder time than I did, and I haven't noticed you keeping to your bunk. I'm all right, and I'm grateful."

The woman really seemed grateful. It gave me a little thrill, because I certainly had been rough enough, particularly with Jason, who never once reminded me about it. When I helped them ashore in San Francisco they embarrassed me with their gratitude and would have given me a present of money had I not been rude about it. Money for that? I'd have been put into a good solid U.S.A. jail for practising midwifery without a diploma. At least, I judged that's what might have happened to me, considering what they do out there to real doctors who out of charity help a poor girl to escape consequences which if visible are called Shame. Of course nothing could have actually happened to me. Our ship flew no Stars and Stripes. But it was the whimsical thought that persisted, and, along with that other thought of what would happen to me anyhow if it became known that I sailed under another man's papers, my mind gave me little peace.

Even to-day, as a result of that experience, I simply cannot



see anything holy or beautiful in childbirth. I'd call it a damned messy function, to say no worse. A hen is much neater.

Captain Grove went ashore while we were discharging. His face was a pasty colour which sat ill upon a seaman. He remained on shore, and when I went to ask him for orders I found him in bed, wasted to a frame, with a puzzled nurse and a grave doctor in attendance.

"They want to clap me in hospital," he said angrily. "Don't you let 'em. When you're ready for sea, I'll come aboard and lie up in my own bunk. No sawbones benefit for me, laddie."

"I've come for orders," I reminded him. "Cargo's out, and the ship's ready to load, unless we're taking grain."

"We'll go up to Vancouver and load tinned salmon on the ship's account," he said. "I was going to hang on here for a grain cargo, but they'll have me under the turf if I don't get to sea."

The doctor shook his head, but could not forcibly hold Grove. I fetched the captain in a carriage and the doctor accompanied us to the wharf.

"If he wants to die at home, Mister Mate, I advise you to get him there without waiting for a cargo. He's a dead man now," he told me when saying good-bye. I suggested something of the sort to Grove, and got well cursed for my trouble. So we towed to sea, and I brought Chips aft to stand a watch, feeling all the responsibility of command with none of the assurance. We ran into fog before we had dipped the Farallones; and I stuck her head offshore and shivered every time a steamer blew. Now I realized to the full what command meant; and I had no right to it! If something happened—it didn't bear thinking of. There was a breeze with the fog, which carried us swiftly along, light as we floated in the water. I never left the deck until there was no hint of a sound from other ships. Not until I calculated that we were a hundred miles away from the busy entrance to 'Frisco Bay did I leave the ship to the second mate and take a look at the Old Man.

"He's sleeping, sir," the steward told me.

I looked in. Captain Grove lay still, with one hand across his chest. In the faint swaying radiance of the turned-down

## DEAD MAN'S SHOES

lamp he seemed to breathe easily. I left the room, and attended to my own needs. I was cold and hungry after fourteen hours on deck in a wet fog. When I had eaten, I drank a stout hooker of rum, and lay on the saloon transom lockers, bidding the steward to call me in an hour.

When next I looked in on Grove I turned up the lamp. The man lay as I had seen him before ; not an inch had he moved. I touched him, and he was stone cold. Then the lamp swung, and again he seemed to breathe. That was the mystery. How long he had been dead the Lord alone knew. I tried to straighten his arm, but it was stiff.

"Steward," I shouted, "Captain Grove is dead! Tell the second mate to come down at once."

The fog still lay thick over the sea. The wind had died, and the barque rolled giddily. I stepped into a dead man's shoes and pondered.

## CHAPTER XIX

### "UNEASY LIES THE HEAD——"

GROVE had owned several sixty-fourth-part shares in the ship; as soon as I anchored in Vancouver I cabled the principal owner for instructions, and was ordered to load as Grove had intended and take the ship home to Australia. Of course I got a thrill out of the affair; but I was never again quite free of the feeling that I sailed precarious waters. Had I possessed the faculty of serious thought I should have quitted there and then; but every time I forced myself to face the future, pride and resentment allied themselves against judgment and I stubbornly blundered ahead. I had buried Grove after keeping him two days, during which the calm persisted and was followed by a breeze which would have been right on the nose if I had tried back for San Francisco. The affair was entered in the log, witnessed by the carpenter and second mate; and I had besides the final advice of the doctor in writing, to guide me in case Grove got worse. He got worse, certainly, but that note of advice was all the corroboration I needed with the log to make my arrival in port clear and easy. There was no fuss. I survived my first real uneasiness.

We sailed for Maryborough, and during a good, fine weather passage across the Pacific I had plenty of opportunity to visualize my future. If I were offered command of the barque, in a regular way, I could see nothing to stop me from enjoying the life that so strongly appealed to me. The steward had left in Vancouver, and as a measure of economy, which I hoped would help to recommend me, I let the Chinese cook act as steward as well. It might have worked out all right if I hadn't caught John Chee going through Grove's gear. I needed the man, so I only gave him a sharp call-down; but he never forgot it, and I know he hated me. I'd get rid of him as soon as possible. If I did secure command, I'd want

a new crew anyhow, for the one I inherited had never taken kindly to the manner of my advancement. The second mate had been in the ship for years; and though he must have realized that he could never rise higher owing to lack of certificates, he resented me. I know I had bought my papers, but then I had them at any rate. He should have bought some if he couldn't earn them. There was nothing wrong with his eyes.

When I met the owner in Queensland, he seemed pleased enough at the way I had conducted the ship since Grove's death; but he was not effusive, on that first day, and would not definitely say that I was to carry on. I returned aboard the ship in the evening in no very pleasant mood. The crew had all gone ashore; the second mate wanted to go, and as I wanted to think matters over I let him. When he had gone, there were only the Chinaman and myself on board.

While I was going over some papers in the saloon John Chee came in. He looked wild, and smelt of brandy. I took no notice of him beyond that, being busy with my job; but presently he came to the table.

"You go pay me off?" he demanded sharply.

"To-morrow, John," I said, thinking the man only wanted to be clear.

"What fo' you pay me off?"

His voice grew shrill. I looked up at him. He was protesting then, and not asking for a quicker release.

"I shall pay you off, John, because you steal," I said. "Go away. I'm busy."

The man uttered a little squeal, and ran up the companion-way chattering madly. I put him from my mind, for I was deep in figures. But soon I heard a terrific clatter on deck. The ship lay alongside a silent wharf, and the uproar shattered the quiet. Cursing the man under my breath, I ran up to investigate. Things were coming out of the galley; first by one door, then by the other, coppers, kettles, skillets flew. John Chee erupted on the side farthest from the wharf, kicking a copper stewpan into the water-ways. He picked it up as I appeared and flung it overboard. That was too much. I leapt for him and grabbed him by the shoulders.

"You'll pay for that!" I said, shaking him. He turned like an eel in my hands, and pulled a knife from his clothes. That was something else again. I tried to smother his hands, and we crashed against the bulwarks, my right arm on the rail to support me. Like a flash of lightning he struck, and the knife went right through my forearm and pinned me to the teak. Whatever coolness I possessed passed from me then. I wrenched the knife from the wood, and, with it sticking in my flesh, closed with John Chee. We stumbled at grips against the spare topmast lashed to the stanchions, and John hopped on to the spar, I after him. There I got a backbreaking hold on his waist, with my skull beneath his chin. I felt his bones cracking; but my own bones were grating against his bloody knife, and I went mad. I heard him grunt as his back was bent over the rail; then he let go of me, and I let go of him. He toppled over and fell into the water. I peered after him, fumbling for a rope; but he never reappeared. I dragged the knife from my arm, and tossed it after him. Then I scanned the wharf. Silence again. Holding my dripping arm, I made my way below and cleansed and bandaged it, feeling sick. When all was done, I swallowed nearly half a bottle of brandy and sat with a thud in my chair, everything suddenly foggy about me.

That was a beastly night for me. I couldn't sleep. But it was not on account of John Chee. Everything that had happened, that could possibly happen to me, persisted in rising before me. Perhaps unreasonably, I kept thinking about that affair in Aden. If this new mishap came out, and that Aden matter were resurrected, where did I stand? Of course they could never be connected, unless somebody got hold of the facts of my dual career. That was just it. Suppose they did?

The second mate came on board. I heard him calling for the steward. When I appeared, my bandaged arm hidden by my coat sleeve, the second mate told me that the steward had not turned up.

"Got a family here, I suppose," he grumbled. "What'll I do about my breakfast?"

"Get some ashore and charge it to the ship," I said. "Get back as soon as you can. I want to go to the office."

If that were all the comment John Chee's disappearance caused, I felt a lot of weight vanish from my shoulders. I followed the second mate on deck, and when he had trotted over the gangway I closely examined the deck and rail for signs of the struggle. There was a little blood on the spar, and a very slight slit in the teak rail; but no more. I suppose my arm had bled little until I pulled out the knife; and then I had gripped the wound tightly with my left hand over the sleeve of my coat. I looked all along the deck, the saloon companion-way, and all the way to my room. Nothing. Only the coat I had worn and the shirt were bloody. I had changed of course. Now I carefully made a bundle of them, wrapped a couple of port-keys inside, and dropped the lot into the water through my own port-hole. "Damn it!" I muttered to myself. "Is a fellow never to know plain sailing?"

The affair had decided me not to remain with the ship, even though the command should be offered to me. I had the wind up, and that's the truth. When I entered the office that forenoon, it was not to plead for my chance, but to demand my discharge. Every man I passed on my way seemed to be looking queerly at me, while the policeman who advanced two steps towards me as I went through the door nearly gave me heart failure.

"Sorry to hear about Captain Grove, sir," the cop said. "Nice gentleman he was. Great friend o' mine. He went easy, I hope?"

"Like a child, officer, just like a child," I answered hurriedly, and ducked inside.

I sat beside the owner's desk, my arm throbbing like the devil. I knew that unless I got that wound attended to right speedily I was in for a lot of trouble. The idea of going to a local doctor frightened me, for he would be certain to want to know how I got that complete perforation of my arm. One doesn't get a hole clean through a limb between the bones in a boxing bout, or playing bridge. Actually I had no need to entertain such fears, yet I suppose nearly every man, unless

he's a regular crook or gangster, would feel uneasy in like circumstances. For all that I was sailing under false colours, I was no expert in crime; the ordinary crimes of humanity never appealed to me; and, after all, I had acted in self-defence.

It's queer how a man will face that which he fears, when ambition or a great desire urges him on. I went into that office determined to quit my first command before I had officially secured it, in spite of all my scheming to arrive at precisely that desirable pinnacle.

"I've sold the entire cargo in Batavia, Captain," the owner told me as soon as we had exchanged greetings. "I haven't yet decided about a permanent master for the barque. I expect the man who sails her to take up shares in her, of course. You can carry on, if you like, and try for a cargo in Batavia when you discharge, then we'll take up the matter again. I'm satisfied with your work so far."

My resolutions went overboard. I accepted that offer, and let my arm go hang. I have no doubt that is why the wound remained open for twenty years afterwards, and a dozen surgeons in all parts of the world assured me that my only hope was to have it amputated. I still have that arm, and have managed to do quite a lot of work with it.

We went to sea that evening with a new crew. Even the second mate had quitted, but I was not sorry to see him go. The new first mate dressed my arm as soon as we were safely at sea, and whatever he may have thought about it he asked no questions. He had only come up from Brisbane that day in answer to my wire to an agency, so both ship and I were strange to him. When the wound was well swabbed with strong iodine, and dressed afterwards with Creso, it felt much easier, and I could carry it in a sling without having to answer curious questions. That was one merit of command, at least. I began to feel a resurgence of pride as I walked the deck and regarded my eminence.

The tricky navigation of the reefs of the Arafura and Flores Seas kept me so much to my work that I almost forgot my wound. In Batavia I had more time to think about it,

for the cargo was all straight case goods in one consignment, and when I had seen the agent I had little to do except scout around for a homeward cargo. Even that proved easy. I learnt that I could secure a full cargo of coffee in two ports in Java, so I had only the time to kill until the cases of salmon were warehoused.

I found a doctor, avoiding hospitals because of their public registers of cases. The Dutchman I saw was voluble, not at all the phlegmatic Dutchman of fiction.

"Dot's a bad vun," he remarked when the wound was exposed. He probed it, making me curse, and laughed a pleasant throaty chuckle. "Stings, dondn't id? I fixed oop vun yoost lige dot day pefore yesterday. Feller got hurt oop in China—der Boxer Var."

"That's where I got this," I said with sudden inspiration. "At Taku Forts."

"Ah! Dem Chinese fellers dondn't vight mit civilized weapons. Dis vos spear?"

"Yes, spear," I said, and kept silent after that, leaving him to babble on while he did a first-rate job on me. But the idea he had given me stuck in my mind, and ever afterwards I kept up the Taku fiction. Until this day but one man in the world, to my knowledge—Gordon MacCreagh of New York—knows the truth about my right arm.

We secured a stiffening of coffee in Batavia, then hauled out of Tandjong Priok and sailed for Surabaya to complete our lading. In Surabaya I received a cablegram from the owner instructing me to sail for Newcastle, N.S.W., but there was no mention made concerning my permanency. On the principle, I suppose, of squatter's claim, I accepted every chance as being entirely to my ultimate advantage, and accordingly delivered my cargo. Then in Newcastle I got a lengthy letter telling me that the owner was ill, and ordering me to load coal for Callao and await further instructions there. I began to see ahead a solid establishment in my command, and to feel something of that sense of security which comes to a pukka shipmaster in whom his owner reposes complete confidence. The coal was duly delivered in Peru,



and I inquired about my orders. It was then that my fabric fell apart. The owner was dead. The ship was to be laid up pending a decision as to her future. I was told that I might remain by her, if I wanted to, until her owner's affairs were cleared up.

Something happened in Callao, however, which again put the wind up me badly. A sailing-ship put in, with most of her crew in irons. I attended the court to hear the case, having little else to occupy my time; and there I heard the record of the ship's master and mates hauled into the daylight, heard the keen cross-examination, noticed the devilish cunning by which a man was tricked into telling about things in his past which put an innocent man in the light of a criminal. Without waiting to hear the outcome of that case, I went straight to the cable office and sent off my resignation.

When my wages arrived, I plunged on a passenger's ticket to Sydney. My arm was again giving me much pain, and I wanted by all means to avoid any resorts to consuls and shipping offices. As a passenger—there was no passport bother then—I believed that I could enjoy a month of absolute relaxation in which I might reconsider the matter of my future.

I had forced myself to the conviction that I was only doing what any man might do in my circumstances. So far as I knew, no man had ever suffered because I used another's name and certificates. My capacity for the work I had taken up was beyond question; the eyesight that alone had debarred me from doing honestly that which I had done illegally had never put in peril either life or property. Yet I was uneasy. It was not what I would have chosen to do in any other circumstances, for in general I hated deceit, detested a liar, and despised a grafter.

All very queer, I suppose. But then I am not setting forth a creed, nor am I defending my actions. I don't advise anybody to follow my example. Simply, and as I recall it, I am setting down truth—let the good people, the dogmatics, the moralists, pick the bones for themselves.

## CHAPTER XX

### "BE SURE YOUR SIN——!"

THIS chapter ought to please the moralists. I am sure I shall get many letters about it. A short time ago I published in a noted American magazine a brief account of the last twenty years of my life, and by one post subsequently I received two letters from the Canadian province of Saskatchewan reproving me. One correspondent mourned the fact that I had quoted a very foolish statement once made by a very noble and famous man; the other complained that nowhere had I given any credit to God. The first critic failed to explain why I ought not to repeat a silly statement which I had heard with my own ears. It was sufficient that my correspondent almost worshipped the utterer of that statement, and therefore anything which in the smallest degree revealed the idol's clay feet must be deplorable. The other correspondent omitted to tell me for what I should thank God. I had written something which, in each case, jarred the emotional susceptibilities of my critics, and that of course was enough.

When I landed in Sydney, I was cured of my indecision. If I could secure another command I meant to take it, and give the Devil another run for my scalp. I was in no hurry, however, and spent a pleasant month sailing about the grand harbour in a hired sloop—visiting the old *Sobraon* with tobacco and papers for her watchman, tacking around Pinchgut and amusing myself with conjectures about what the prisoners of an earlier day must have thought of their humanitarian jailers, who encouraged sharks to swim about the little island as an aid to vigilance. I learnt in Sydney harbour, also, as no mere big-ship man can learn, the ferocity of a southerly 'buster,' and the blasting terror of the hot 'brickyarder' from the north. In a small sailing craft such things are serious adversaries.

For the first time in years I had a chance to review the advance of everyday usage. I, remembering bustles, now heard elderly folks deplore the collapse of morality because pretty girls wore frocks which permitted their trim legs to be admired. The new electric trams were handling the growing traffic splendidly; but numbers of middle-aged people were writing to the papers condemning them, mourning the passing of the old steam trains. The grumblers complained of the noise and the deadly speed, forgetting the rattle and crash, the whistling, smoke, and cinders of the old days. For my part, I liked to be able to admire a pretty leg without risking a slap in the face, and I found the new trams wholly admirable.

A soldier in Tattersall's bar introduced me to a couple of new tricks in the commercial-lady line. They worked the ships chiefly. In the guise of laundresses, or sisters of mercy, pretty girls canvassed the big liners for clients for their houses. I saw some of them working, and could well believe that they achieved great results. The laundry girls really secured washing orders, but of course never did any laundry work, though I would readily have entrusted my shirt to some whom I saw. As for the little sisters, such prim and modest faces surely never peeped from beneath a hood—until one winked at a fellow and smiled.

One day when I was feeling the urge to action, I saw in a shipping paper an advertisement which sent me hotfoot to a small and dingy office near Argyll Cut. There I interviewed a very old Chinaman dressed up to the modern nines, yet as Chinese as the Great Wall. He had a steamship, the *Maro*, and wanted to get a British master for her. He was starting a new trade, and if this first steamer made him a profit, there would be other and better ships to follow.

While I thought it over, the ancient Chinaman keenly scrutinized my papers. He became voluble, and I sensed the need for caution on my part. A steamer now, to me, meant a liner in the future. I recalled the gorgeous commanders in the P. & O.; the life they led was luxury's peak to a wind-jammer man. Even the master of the grubby little *Godiva* had seemed to be a creature apart from common seafarers.

A sailing-ship skipper might have his dignity, his aloofness, but he could never put on 'dog' as could a steamer commander.

I asked for particulars. Where was the *Maro*? Perhaps I'd look her over.

"Velly fine steamer, Captain. Old ship, but velly fine. Go look-see. I give you chit. You come back quick."

I hired a boatman and directed him to Mosman's Bay. He grinned.

"You ain't thinkin' o' takin' no job in *her*?" he remarked.

"What's wrong with her?" I asked.

"Nothin' much. She's only been off register for years. Some Chink is thinkin' o' runnin' her. He'll make money out of her, but nobody else will."

We approached the steamer, and as she swung lazily to slack cables her rusty sides seemed to turn all colours in the brilliant sunlight. She possessed looks of a sort, but sadly needed dry-docking. The grass hung at her waterline a foot long. She was fairly big, and might carry a good cargo, but she was no lady of the sea.

I clambered up the pilot ladder and told the boatman to wait. The decks were iron, blistered and dented. The hatches were partly uncovered, and a sour smell came up from the hold. The ship seemed deserted, except for one very old brown-skinned fellow who took no notice of me. I wandered up to the bridge-deck, listening for sounds of life. Everywhere was decay. In the chart-room, saloon, cabins, only silence reigned and foetid gloom. I hurried out into the sunlight again ready to go ashore, when a faint clang of metal arose through the engine-room skylight. Following the sound I climbed down interminable steel ladders to the engine-room, where I found a funny little man in very badly used dungarees, surrounded by bits of machinery, packing, and grease. He gave me one glance, then bent again to his work.

"I'm looking her over to see if I'll take her," I said.

"What have you against *your* ticket?" he grunted, giving me a closer scrutiny. I grinned, for it was a shrewd comment, and characterized the ship.

"Not a thing," I returned. "I want to try steam. Are you one of the engineers?"

"I'm the chief." He stuffed a lot of greasy gasketting into a steel receptacle.

"What's wrong with *your* ticket?" I asked pleasantly. He straightened up with a frown.

"When you're my age, laddie, you don't need to have anything the matter with your ticket to take a chief's job wherever you can find it," he said.

"I see. Then why shouldn't I take command of her? What's wrong with her?"

"Wait till I finish this vacuum pump, and I'll have a crack with you," he replied, and while waiting for him I had a good look around the engine-room and stokehold, making my first close acquaintance with marine engines.

I liked old Peter Urquhart right away. He took me to his room, which opened off an upper platform grating, and brought out a bottle of whisky. He told me all he knew about the *Maro*, and I had heard worse tales about ships in my time. He was much older than I had believed him at first sight—sixty at least—with a tale of dogged hard luck which made my own ups and downs seem paltry. The worst he could say about the ship was that she was in shocking condition, her engines were ramshackle, and she was Chinese-owned, none of which objections bothered me much. Chipping hammers and paint would mend her appearance, and I had heard wonderful yarns of miracles worked by clever engineers; besides, she was going into the Eastern trade, with no lengthy passages in prospect.

"She'll eat coal," commented Peter, rolling whisky round his mouth gratefully. "I've had better wages as second, but there's a good bonus to be made on coal-saving—unless some hell-for-leather young upstart is on the bridge." He avoided my eyes as he said this, refilling my glass.

Yes, I liked old Peter. I bade him so-long and went ashore, not yet quite decided. Looking back at the steamer from half a mile's distance, she didn't seem so bad. A gleaming Orient liner was steaming for the heads, and I thought the old *Maro*

looked almost as fine as she, with the sun upon her and the grass at her waterline removed by distance. I returned to the office, and accepted the berth.

"She ought to be dry-docked," I suggested. "She'll make better time with all that grass taken off her."

"No matte'. No cally mail," the owner said indifferently. "No can affo'd dock now. Melbbe you make plofit, then we see. Seven knot plenty."

The *Maro* made seven knots—sometimes. If I tried to bustle old Peter into making an extra half-knot, something was bound to break down—a condenser, a pump, or a bearing. Seven knots it was, and seven knots it had to be. For several months we wallowed about the East, Borneo, Celebes, the Moluccas, Java Sea, China and Cochin China, picking up a bit here, a bit there, doing on the whole pretty well. When we returned to Sydney, the owner was as pleased as I ever saw a Chinaman.

"Now we put the ship in dry-dock," he said, wringing his skinny hands. "I got ca'go fo' Amelica. Soon I buy anolle' ship—mo' bette' fo' you, Captain."

Peter and I talked the prospect over while the ship was having her bottom compo'ed and a new propeller fitted. The old screw had been a terrible piece of junk, and the wonder was that she had ever achieved even a modest seven knots. She had lost one blade entirely, and the opposite one was broken off half-way; she had been working on two blades ever since we took her over. In my inexperienced view the new propeller and clean hull would turn her into a ten-knot ship, and I told Peter so.

He regarded me curiously.

"Man, there's much to learn for the likes o' you," he said grimly. He paused to fill our glasses, and gulped half his peg before speaking again. "What's the longest open-sea passage you'll be taking, *if* you take her to the States?"

"There's no 'if' about it," I retorted, irritably. "Of course I'm taking her. The longest sea stretch is roughly four thousand five hundred miles if we go by way of Magellan

Straits, four thousand eight hundred if we take the Cape route."

"I wish I was not needing the money so badly," sighed old Peter. I thought it was a whisky sigh, so ignored it.

To me this chance to take a steamer on such a long passage spelt establishment. All my earlier uncertainties vanished on the day when I took the *Maro* from dry-dock and berthed her for loading. The Chinaman had gambled on a cargo of Australian wine and tinned rabbit, and apparently he can have known as little about the United States as I did. Certainly, judging by his success in securing cargoes for me in the East, he ought to have known better than to take cats to Kilkenny—which was about what taking rabbit to America amounted to. I never met an American who didn't hate rabbit, unless he had lived for a considerable time in England or Belgium; and as for Australian wine, well, Americans who have money want a French or German label on their bottles, while if they have only speak-easy incomes they demand liquor with a wallop in it.

But here I was, walking the bridge of a sizeable steamer which, in appearance at least, might be compared not unfavourably with any in the harbour of her size and type. Like slipping off an old glove, and as John Chee slipped through my hands, so slipped away all my recent past from me. I saw myself steaming into Boston with all my signals flying and my cargo intact; shaking hands with old Peter upon the completion of a profitable, trouble-free passage; and sending home to my owner such a report as would send him out in a hurry to buy a bigger and better steamer with my name already set down to command her.

Peter managed to grind eight knots out of her on the first day. He even came to table on that first evening wearing a mess-jacket. I had never seen Peter so untroubled before, nor was I to do so again.

While on this long open-water passage to the southerly tip of America, I tried to establish a routine which would bolster up my sense of command. I insisted upon decent dress at the saloon table; Peter and I wore mess-jackets not very

different from those worn by real liner officers; and since for a week or so no trouble arose in the engine-room, the mates and engineers showed no obvious dislike of the new regulation.

After clearing Cook's Strait, and entering upon the great Circle track for Magellan, it was borne in upon Peter no less than myself that the amazing fatalism of the Chinese was no myth.

"Sir, I doubt if I'll hold them machines together at eight knots," Peter reported when we were little more than a week out.

"I'll get some sail on her," I told him curtly. I meant to indulge none of old Peter's doleful misgivings.

At that period of steam navigation all steamers trading to Australia or New Zealand by way of the Cape of Good Hope from Britain were square-rigged on at least one mast, or had once been so rigged. All the early steamers of the Aberdeen Line, Shaw Savill, and New Zealand Shipping Company were barquentine-rigged, and some were even barque-rigged; they used every stitch of canvas they could spread between the Cape and Australia. The *Maro* had been square-rigged on the foremast originally, and the yards and sails of her youth still lay in the 'tweendecks. I told the mate to break them out and rig her again, while the old sails were patched and mended ready to set. When the canvas was pulling, we picked up speed, and in the second week averaged eight knots, and the engines were greatly eased. Towards the end of the fourth week, however, the crazy gear blew away in a squall, and old Peter came up to the bridge immediately he sensed by the added strain on his precarious engines that something had happened.

"I advise you to cable the owner from Punta Arenas," he said bluntly. "I can keep the bilge pumps going just by God and good luck. The vacuum pump has turned it in twice, but you've not noticed anything wrong because she'd go as fast under sail alone with the wind we've had. But she'll never hold out."

"What can break down that hasn't already?" I asked sharply, for his tone annoyed me.



"There's nothing left to break down. But the water's come over the footplates a dozen times, and if the bilge pumps turn it in—well, skipper, I never went sailing in a lifeboat yet, and at my time o' life I don't ache to try it."

"Are you refusing—?" I began, and Peter flung down his cap, his face flaming.

"Don't talk wet!" he shouted. "I'm giving you a bit of friendly advice. Cable from Punta Arenas, and it'll cost you only a bit o' your bonus; carry on, and——"

I did old Peter a rank injustice then, and I have never ceased regretting it.

"Cost me a bit of my bonus and save a lot of yours?" I said.

"Captain, you may sail her to hell!" Peter snapped, and left me in real anger for the first time since I met him.

Cape Pillar and the Straits! What a relief, after the long wide water passage, to see land on both sides! I found the passage of the Straits much less forbidding than the Sailing Directories described it, and more interesting. Peter never again voiced his protest until we were getting our anchor after coaling in Punta Arenas. Then he came hesitantly to my room, where I was plotting my next course while waiting for the mate to report the anchor under foot.

"I'd suggest, Captain, that you follow the coast at least as far as San Roque," he said civilly. "I'm not thinking of my bonus. I'd like to know that the coast is in reach, though, in case the pumps give out. That's all I have to say, sir." He departed as he had come, and I, feeling irritable again, let him go without a thought except that he was scared of his rotten engines.

I laid a course direct from the Virgins to Cape Frio, and called for seven knots. That ought to please old Peter, I considered. But Peter no longer came to the saloon for his meals. When off the Plate, he sent up a chit suggesting that I put in at Montevideo to have the pumps repaired, and to that I sent back the inquiry: Could he carry on with help from the deck-hands? I think that finished Peter. Take help from the deck-hands? Hell! . . .

Neither Peter nor his second or third engineers again ate at table. I sent down all the deck-hands except four who were essential to keep wheel and look-out, and the ship seemed to hold her speed. The weather remained my friend; but off the Brazilian capes, with nothing in sight on a clear starry night except a line of reefs, and to seaward only a rising breeze ruffling the water, Peter appeared on the bridge while I was taking a star sight. He waited patiently until I set down my sextant.

“Can you make port quickly?” he blurted out.

“What’s up?” I returned, suddenly aware of a crisis. “It’s pretty much the same thing whether we say Pernambuco or Ceara. Spit it out, man!”

“The pumps are gone! Water is over the plates. These old boilers will go up sure as death if we can’t keep the water down!”

“Can’t you keep the pumps going if you cut down the revolutions?”

“Damnation! Haven’t I told you the pumps are gone? It’s no matter of steam—the pumps—are—finished!”

I let him go. No word did I pass to mate or man until I had laid a course for Ceara. Then I called the officer of the watch and gave him the new course. I simply told him that we were putting in to Ceara because our main fresh-water tank was leaking. When I ordered the hand pumps to be manned, the truth began to percolate through the ship, and men talked in excited undertones. Then I told the mate the truth, and, decent man, he went straight away to overhaul the boats.

It was an hour past midnight when Peter and his second engineer came up on the heels of a noisy crowd of fire-room hands. Steam was roaring from the pipe; it stopped suddenly as Peter reached me. He turned back with a broken curse, and fear was in his face. Then the ship rocked and heaved; steam and smoke erupted from the fiddley as from a volcano. I saw Peter vanish down the ladder, the second engineer on top of him; my mate came running, and disappeared when midway of the other ladder. The helmsman ran, and seemed

to hang in the air for an instant, holding his hands aloft; then the entire vessel reeled, seemed to fall apart, and a hollow roar enveloped me.

I clung to the bridge-rail, and remember watching a section of the funnel going aloft like an unopened umbrella. Then something hit me on the head.

When next I opened my eyes, I looked up into the face of a stranger.

"You've decided to wake up," said a pleasant voice. "Fine and dandy! I guess you got quite a whang on the old bean, eh?"

It was a youthful voice, without frills, and slightly nasal. I suppose I nodded. The man asked me about the wreck, but I must have made little response, for he slapped some liquor into my mouth, adjusted a bandage on my head, and left me to fall into a deep sleep again.

When I fully awoke, I felt clearer in my mind; so much so that I immediately began to think about the future rather than the present or the past. I tried to stagger on deck, and found it difficult, but I managed to reach the poop, and saw that I was aboard a very clean, fairly large three-masted schooner, which was leaning gently to a pleasant breeze and steering north. Two men were washing paintwork in the waist, and the man at the wheel chewed tobacco and spat fulsome and free to looard, unconcerned at the close proximity of the officer of the watch. I looked keenly around, but could see nothing to indicate that anybody else had been picked up from the unlucky *Maro*. The mate paid no attention to me, and my brain began to buzz with the problem aroused by my new situation.

Here was the very ghost that, unknown to me, must have haunted me every day since I bought those papers in Mauritius. Very soon, I knew, there would be questions to answer. A ship like the *Maro* would hardly disappear without leaving a trace. There would certainly be an inquiry, and then I was bound to be hauled over the coals, as master. Master! Yes, in another man's name, the name of an inno-

cent man. I'd be blamed, never a doubt of that; blamed because I could never contradict old Peter's evidence that he had warned me. It would make little real difference to me, perhaps. I had tried many things, and could try as many more; but whatever happened on the *Maro's* account would surely be debited to a man who was as innocent as a babe unborn—the real owner of the papers I sailed under. That reflection brought me to a dead end then.

The young fellow called me to his room. He was a bright young skipper, and fired a lot of questions at me. I had found myself dressed in strange clothes when first I awoke to see him bending over me, and now I knew they were his.

"What ship dumped you out?" he asked. "All we found was a lot of wreckage, with you draped across a wheelhouse adrift. Tell me all you know, for my log."

"You found nobody else, sir?" I countered anxiously.

"Not a cat. Don't know how long you were adrift, but we picked you up this morning—February eleventh, it is."

"My God! She blew up on the ninth!" I exclaimed, while he looked at me curiously. "Nobody else at all, sir?" I repeated.

"Not by this ship. What was she?"

"*Maro*, steamer, Sydney for Boston," I answered dully. "Jesus! There were twenty-four hands!"

"Don't you worry," he said soothingly. "The rest will have been picked up, I guess. Somebody did you a mean turn, leaving you like that. What were you? Mate?"

I had a swift brain-wave. If he didn't know by my clothes what rank I had in the *Maro*, my identity must have been pretty well wiped out.

"I'm a steward, sir," I said quickly. "If you can give me work to do I'll do my best."

"Them as don't work don't eat in my vessel," the skipper grinned, but he gave me no grounds for suspecting that he doubted my claim of stewardship.

I was turned over to the schooner's steward, and given an easy job for a few days cleaning brightwork in the little saloon. I learnt that the *Lily* belonged to Boston, and was

bound home. I was very kindly treated in the little schooner, and the steward was a chatty soul. He told me that the *Lily* had sailed through a mass of wreckage, but they had seen nothing of either ship or boats, and none of the wreckage bore the vessel's name. That, I knew, was the result of having fitted out the steamer with second-hand gear. Even the *Maro's* boats had not borne her name at the time of the disaster, for I had been painting the name-plates afresh myself in my spare time, and they were all in my room.

It seems to me that the whole affair was very much of a parable of life. I should have screwed those name-plates on in a day or so. You mean to do things all your days, and then you blow up with them undone.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A NEW DEPARTURE

WHEN I came to examine the rags in which I was picked up, I understood better what must have happened to me. I had been wearing white drill, with ordinary bone buttons, and the rags were blackened and water-soaked. The injury to my head suggested that I had been driven through the wheelhouse bulkhead. Nothing remained in the pockets of those rags of mine except my pipe and a bit of saturated plug tobacco. Everything else I possessed was lost. Thus the nearer we got to Boston the clearer seemed my course. When I had shaved my beard, and let the sun get to work for a few days on my skin, I would be able to look in a mirror with a feeling of security. I knew nothing about the States, except what I had seen during a sketchy experience of west-coast ports, but I had heard a good deal, and had no fears.

I meant to avoid being identified with the *Maro*. Nobody would trouble to trace a steward, I believed; and if I just dropped out of sight, and turned up elsewhere under my own name, very soon it would be assumed that the captain of the *Maro* had been lost with his ship; then that decent young fellow whose name I had used would never suffer—and so far as I ever heard he never did.

In Boston I slipped ashore as any member of the *Lily's* crew might do, wearing borrowed clothes. Luck played fair with me for once, for before I had lost sight of the schooner's masts I came upon a little steamer with a red and black funnel, whose passengers were already going on board. She was the *Chatahoochee*, bound for Savannah and on the point of sailing. Stewards were humping baggage, and, going on board with all the assurance in the world, I accosted a lean little man who chewed tobacco with nervous gusto, and whose cap bore the words "Second Steward."

Joe Davis will always linger in my memory as a friend. I asked him for a job, merely describing myself as an English steward, and he took me on at once. There was no signing on in that ship; the company provided white jackets—the only bit of uniform required—and I soon found that most of the stewards were runaways from British liners. The pay was thirty dollars a month, and wages in British liners across the Atlantic were but half that rate. I kept out of sight until we slid past the *Lily*, and took no chances until we steamed past Boston Light, but after that I set to work in earnest to make good in my new career.

Stewarding was vastly different here compared with the lordly P. & O. There was no scrubbing to do, because the saloon and alley-ways were covered with carpet or lino. Stewards and passengers appeared to mix on an even footing; we ate at the saloon tables after the passengers had got up, and chose our meals from the same bill of fare. Tips were dribbled to us in dimes and quarters whenever we rendered a service. Every waiter was also a bedroom steward, except myself, and I had to take care of the smoking-room. I made a heap of small change in the three days' run to Savannah; but to earn it I had to remain on duty every night until the last poker game was done. All in all, it wasn't so bad, although it lacked dignity.

My luck held good in Savannah, for Joe Davis had taken a liking to me, and when he was transferred to the *Kansas City* of the same line, but plying to New York, he took me with him and gave me a good set of drums. It was promotion, for I knew how much bedroom stewards had made in the P. & O. This was not quite the same thing, I soon discovered, but it was better than serving meals and drinks, and I completed six round voyages in the *Kansas City* before I found myself growing restless.

One of the stewards with whom I became chummy had been steward of a yacht, and the tales he told me of yachting started a new bee buzzing in my bonnet. He was leaving the Savannah Line to join his yacht for the season, and offered to show me the ropes. Engagements were chiefly

secured through the firm of outfitters who supplied yacht uniforms, and I was astonished to find how easy it was to land a berth in what I had supposed must be a most select employment. I served for part of the season as second steward of a steam yacht, the *Celt*, then heard of a bedroom steward's berth to be had in the much bigger *Waturus*, and went after that and got it. The yacht had belonged to the Emperor of Austria, and had been purchased by Mr Randal Morgan, of Philadelphia, for the sole purpose of entertaining President Roosevelt on a cruise. We picked up the President at his home in Oyster Bay, and carried him to Bar Harbour and back. That was not a very pleasant cruise, for at every port we visited there were great affairs arranged for our august guest's amusement, and whenever we gave a big dinner-party on board we were overrun by extra waiters from the shore—chiefly old ex-butlers or footmen, who knew the ropes too well and kept us on the alert for our wines and silver.

At the end of the season I again struck a bit of luck, and got a job of chief steward in a big schooner yacht going to the West Indies for the winter. In that vessel we visited the Cuban battlefields, and the ruins of St Pierre still hot from the eruption of Pelée. Andrew Carnegie's cousin was our boss that cruise, and he spoilt two thousand dollars' worth of stores because he refused to pay forty dollars a ton for ice in Haiti.

Things had been going too smoothly for me to last. On arriving back in Brooklyn in February, I found no yachts taking on hands. The schooner was laid up, and I was again on the beach.

I had a few dollars saved up, however, so I went down to West Street, where the ships were, and took a small room over Skeets McCourt's saloon at the corner of Spring Street. After a week I got my room free and all the beer I wanted in exchange for a bit of work cleaning cuspidors when the saloon was closed. The big liners took no stewards on in New York then. I had made up my mind to go in no more American steamers. In fact, as time went on, I felt an



awful ache for a settled job ashore in which I might eventually forget the sea. Ever since the loss of the *Maro* I had funk'd the idea of looking for command again; and even if I had conquered my fear, I had lost all my papers.

Sometimes I went up to the Library, and one day curiosity got the better of me and I went through a file of newspapers covering the date of the *Maro's* disaster. After a search I found a brief paragraph mentioning the arrival of some castaways at Pernambuco. In another paper there was a shorter report of the arrival of the *Lily* at Boston with a man picked up from sea. He was described as a steward. I could find nothing more, and I felt secure at last.

I wrote to my brother while in New York, and by the same mail as brought his reply I received a letter from my father, which showed a change in his attitude towards me. Since he had made the first advance, I met him handsomely, writing a very nice apology to his wife, which I did not feel in the least that I was called upon to make. Father had said in his letter that he could never forget that I was his son, to which I replied that I could never forget that he was my father, and, for the time being, that was that.

My cash was dwindling when one day I met in the bar a man who appeared to have plenty of money in his overalls, though he was unshaven and rough-looking. We hit it off pretty well, and he told me he was an old English wind-jammer man, working over in Brooklyn for the Baltimore firm of Bartlett and Hayward, building gasworks. He was a rigger, and he offered to get me a job, so off I went. My hands had softened terribly, but I knew rigging and got taken on at fifteen dollars a week—wet days lost.

For three months I worked, raising derricks, rigging hoists, lifting heavy castings and sections of steel chimneys. After our rigger's work was done, the house-smiths followed, and I soon learned that they earned as much in two days as I earned in a week. I knew I could do their work, so set my course for a job at it.

In preparation for it, and to make an impression on their foreman, I took chances in my own work which were not at

all necessary, but which I saw the house-smiths taking daily. One day I stepped from a girder on to a hoisting casting, to change over a hookrope, missed the sling, slipped, and was only saved from a fall of forty feet by gripping the sharp edge of a plate. When I got safely to earth I sat bewildered. How had I made that miscalculation? I could swear I had gauged that step accurately.

The foreman spoke to me kindly, but firmly.

"You must be half blind," he said. "Can't have you breaking your neck and costing the firm money. I'll give you a job in the store hut."

"What wages?" I snapped savagely.

"Twelve dollars. I've been watching you for a long time. You can do the work all right, but this ain't a blind man's home."

"Give me my pay," I said abruptly.

The man was in the right, and I knew it; but what man who has known keen vision will admit that he needs glasses? I hated the idea of glasses with a bitter hate. The Great War changed much of the prejudice against outdoor men who had to wear glasses, but at that time you saw few men in the more active callings wearing them.

I had met in McCourt's saloon a man of education who was in some way mixed up with the dirtier side of politics. He often spoke of the Big Fellow of Tammany with an air of familiarity. As I got to know him better he told me many things which did not increase my desire to remain in America. He had come to the States on graduating from Trinity, Dublin, and, like so many Irishmen, had immediately attached himself to Tammany, the great American octopus. He was thoroughly disillusioned at the time I met him, but he was sixty years old then, and had been too long in the mire to be able to release himself. He offered to speak to the Big Fellow about a job for me, but he was not very enthusiastic, and neither was I. I would sling hash, clean cuspidors, follow horses with a broom, do almost anything, but I wouldn't touch New York's politics. We parted friends.

One other queer job came my way before I quitted New York. I knew a waiter at the Millionaires' Club, and when I was about to seek a seagoing job he told me that he could send me to a first-rate place if I cared to try domestic service. Without much interest I called at a mansion in Madison Avenue and presented his letter to the butler. That house must have been in tremendous need of a third man for the moment, because I was engaged, much to my astonishment, and found that I had landed a liveried job in the house of Pierpont Morgan the elder. They called me second footman, and I slept in the house. It was a gorgeous place, so full of art treasures that priceless Old Masters were crammed into an attic for want of space to hang them. On the immense table in the old gentleman's study were many curious old watches, two of which I remember fascinated me to the point of making me waste a lot of time which I ought to have given to dusting. One had on its face a picture, formed of jewels, of a smithy, the other of a lady playing a spinet; and at the hours, halves, and quarters the smith beat on his anvil, and the lady struck the keys.

In the house were a fat dog named Son and a funny bird which they called Rubberneck because whenever anybody entered the dining-room it screamed that word with twenty-parrot-power ferocity. Miss Anne Morgan was the handsomest woman I had ever seen, and I wondered why she had not married a prince at least. She would have graced a title far better than a lot of film stars have done at a later day, for she was in every way a fine lady.

My work consisted chiefly in cleaning silver, washing table gear, answering the door, helping old Pierpont Morgan on or off with his coat, and waiting at table when there was a big dinner. I was willing to settle down to the life of a flunkey, for it was a most comfortable and happy house; but the old bogey was after me. After a while the butler found fault with me—silver was not properly cleaned, fine china was not immaculate, there were stains on the porcelain of the sink—and when I peered closely at the faulty articles I saw that he was right. My eyes were beating me again. The

butler must have spoken to Miss Morgan about me, for she in turn spoke to me, and though she very kindly permitted me to remain until the household went up the Hudson for the summer, that was the end of the engagement. I was once more on the pavements of the big city.

Now home suddenly had a meaning to me. Long ago I had written to the girl in St Aldate's advising her to forget me and take up with some home-loving fellow, so I had no thought of seeing her again; but since the brief exchange of letters with my father, I wanted to see him. I began tramping West Street, visiting the liners, little hoping; but at last I got a job on the cattle-deck of a London steamer, which carried me home in a leisurely nine days.

Some devil of perversity had surely bored under my hide, for after longing for home all this time when I got there I would have none of it. I saw a chance to join the steamer as a steward, and, much as I disliked the work, nothing would do but I must go to Tower Hill for copies of my discharges and with them take the job. I completed six voyages across the Atlantic—on one of which I took an oar in the lifeboat which rescued forty men and a woman from a big dismasted barque in a fierce winter gale—then again my eyes played traitor and because my work was not up to standard I was given the alternative of quitting or taking on the job of officers' servant. That, however, was more than I was able to tackle.

I quitted the ship, and before anything else could happen to change my course I took the train to Oxford.

The first thing that took me flat-aback on my arrival was the discovery that the girl was actually waiting for me to come home. Of course it was foolish of her, and so I told her, but somehow I read loyalty in her constancy, and felt a bit impressed by it. Everybody who knew us had taken it for granted that there was an understanding between us, and had been for years. I think now that was the true reason for her sticking to me—what people would say, or think, or both. She was nearly twenty-five then, and in our narrow circle—the true provincial circle of the small town—I was

expected to marry her after keeping her hanging in the wind for so long.

My father had changed terribly. He had developed consumption, and looked really pitiful. His recent rise in the world was easy to understand. His wages at the shop had never exceeded forty-one shillings a week; but he was secretary and auditor of an Oddfellows' Lodge, was on the committee of the local Co-op., went twice a month to Cumnor, where he was secretary of still another Oddfellows' Lodge, and earned a little from all. In addition, he must have earned all the physical inflictions which made his last days so terrible, for he cycled about in all weathers. But he made the best use of his means, and had bought a tiny cottage at Boar's Hill, almost where John Masefield's house stands now, and I saw it very recently when paying a visit to the Poet Laureate.

My first lazy week was spent at the cottage in the hottest month of a hot summer, and my stepmother was civil to me, though the atmosphere was never exactly cordial. There were two children now, and they seemed to regard me as a dreadful being to whom it paid to be nice. Father and I spoke about my future, and I told him as much as I felt wise about my past. When I mentioned my eyesight, he nodded.

"That finishes the sea for you, my boy. Better let me speak to John Hanks about you. He's chairman of a big wholesale grocery concern in London, and I'm sure he can slip you into a job there."

Father also told me that I ought to marry and settle down. He had met the girl, and said he liked her, and she was just the wife for me—no frills or big notions. I wasn't averse to marrying, but I didn't like grocery particularly, so I promised to think it over, and if I failed to find work on my own in London I'd let him use what influence he possessed.

When I returned to London it was understood that as soon as I was working regularly at a reasonable wage I would come home and marry the girl. She vowed she was madly in love, and perhaps she really believed she was; for my part,

I simply felt that I was expected to do something and was weak enough to resign myself to it.

I took lodgings in Canning Town, where years before I had roomed with Harvey, and on my first visit to a saloon bar I met an old quartermaster who had been in the *China* with me. He was working at the Thames Ironworks as a rigger, and suggested that I might find work there. He introduced me to his foreman, Peter King. I never quite understood how he could afford to frequent saloon bars and stand treat to men like Peter King, for wages at the ironworks were exactly the same as I had earned on Scrutton's shore gang, sixpence an hour. However, that was none of my business; I got a job, and became one of Clement Macrow's labourers.

As a new hand, I was put into the scratch gang, working the tides, cleaning Thames slime from the slipway before the real shipbuilders started work. We were out at any hour from 2 to 6 A.M., hip-booted in the murky water, shovelling mud, stirring it up with long paddles, shoving away the flotsam of the night. Once we had to shift a dead horse, its bloated carcase writhing with fat eels. Those eels we sold to a stewed-eel merchant and had beer. Another cold dawn we found a dead woman, and launched her again for somebody else to find and report to the police. From such work as that we went to our breakfast in a dark tool-shed, and got ready to commence our real jobs when the eight-o'clock whistle blew.

It was a hard business concern, the old T.I. There was a timekeeper even at the lavatory, and a man had to check in and out, and have his time recorded.

On the building-slips there were two battleships, the *Duncan* and the *Cornwallis*; and the yard still spoke grimly about the *Albion* disaster. Some weeks, when tides were early, we earned thirty shillings; others, when tides occurred during the common working hours, we earned our bare twenty-four bob, or less if there were wet days. For recreation after work there were the pubs; for luxury, fish-and-chips shops and whelk-stalls. Music-halls were free-and-easy haunts where a

man might pick up an amiable woman for the price of a seat and a pint.

Very soon I found myself slipping into the ways of the rest of the gang. I ceased to change in the evening, and lived in my overalls. When I realized what was happening, I hauled myself up sharply, thought matters over, and sat down to write home, asking for that introduction to John Hanks. In the end I met the gentleman at the big White-chapel premises. When I first saw him, he was sitting in the chair at a Board meeting which had just risen. He still sat—asleep—and I thought he looked drunk. Perhaps that was why he retained his chairmanship. The Board need never fear him. But when I made myself known to him he greeted me effusively, introduced me at once to the manager of the warehouse, and I entered a new employ as a loader at twenty-six shillings a week and my white jackets and aprons.

**PART II**  
**LANDLUBBER AND SCRIBBLER**





## CHAPTER XXII

### LONDONER

THE sea was now definitely in the past. Greatly though I resented the reason, the fact was now too apparent to be blinked. My eyes were getting worse, and I no longer tried to fool myself about them. I walked many a mile in London because I could not read the bus or tram direction boards and shrank from the busman's sarcasm which I felt certain would be hurled at me if I stepped aboard the wrong vehicle. So self-conscious did I become that a terrible shyness settled over me; not the mere shyness of a person unused to society, but the more painful shyness of one unduly sensitive who dreads marked attention.

At first I lodged in Bethnal Green, living cheaply and saving up for that home to come. My work at the warehouse was strange to me. From nine in the morning until five, six, or seven in the evening I loaded vans with tons of cheese, butter, eggs, cases of groceries, and bales of brown paper; I hauled bogies and baskets from cellar to loading flap, working the hoist, or lift, myself; sprinkled and swept the floors on starting work in the morning, and often carried on my back to the passenger-train office a damnable cubical box of New Zealand butter weighing sixty pounds, which was assuredly deliberately invented to cripple warehousemen. All the while, however, I was keeping tally of the better jobs to be aimed for. There were fine offices over the warehouse, and the clerks seemed to enjoy a pretty good life. Perhaps, if I carried on, doing my work to the top of my powers, I might in time ask for and obtain promotion to a white-collar job. For the present I was nothing but a labourer in a white jacket and apron, with a truck and a tack-hammer of my own, and the privilege of doing a horse out of a job.

Bethnal Green was splendid for economy, but it was very

noisy, and a bit sordid, and an excellent inducement for me to hurry up and establish that home I now hungered after. When I started, I had very little money and very few clothes. Shoe-leather became a problem, for every time I picked up a load on my truck I had to put my foot against the axle while hauling back on the handles, and that broke a sole clean across in a week. I bought a lot of boots at a second-hand shop and used them in my work to save my good boots at the cost of sore feet.

When I had saved twenty pounds I wrote to the girl and asked what about it. My father sent me a fiver when I told him the news, and my brother chipped in with the price of some kitchen chairs. By shopping around the second-hand places I found that my money would furnish three small rooms, and the next thing was to find three rooms at the moderate rent I could afford. After much searching I found them in Hackney, near Victoria Park, at eight shillings a week. You had to carry your water up, carry your slops down; the gas was on a penny-in-the-slot meter; the coalbox was two floors down, round at the back—"and yer better 'ave a lock on it," a fellow-roomer advised me.

Before going down to Oxford to complete the job at a Registry Office, I laid in a bit of coal, some groceries, and set aside enough pennies for a month's gas. My festive raiment was the next consideration, and I was a long way out of my reckoning there. Nothing that I possessed was fit to be married in, and my cash was pretty well expended on furnishing the home. Scouring Cambridge Heath, I bought at a little shoddy shop a gorgeous suit for thirteen-and-six, a terrible thing which screamed its price, and which I knew would look like nothing on earth if rain ever fell upon it. I gambled on the weather, and hoped the suit would see me through. I had only to count on three days, the wedding included, before going back to work, and after that the suit would last me a year for work, no matter what it looked like. Finally, just before leaving my rooms to go to Paddington, I asked my landlady to light my fire and put on a kettle at six o'clock, so that when I handed in my bride to her new home everything would be merry and bright. She might even miss seeing that the wallpaper was loose.

My father declined to attend my marriage, because it was not conducted in a place of worship. I don't think he ever appreciated my reasons, which were simply that I refused to make a convenience of a place for which I had no use at other times. To me, that appeared to be an excellent and honest reason. The girl's mother and brother escorted us to the shambles, and we ate cake and drank tea in the mother's home afterwards. We paid a flying visit to the shop in Market Street, where Father kindly gave us his blessing and bade me take hold of life seriously. Then it was a rush to catch the train back to London. I was in Oxford, altogether, less than an hour and a half.

All the way back to Town I felt warm in the hope that even though my wife might not feel entirely happy in the poor rooms I had fitted out for her, she would not fail to back me up in my aim for advancement. That was a solid and comforting hope. Then, as we trammed it and tubed it to Hackney, I grew all expectant of the thrill to be mine when we entered our little home and found the kettle singing like mad on a bright fire and everything laid in for the week-end, not even a loaf of bread to shop for and break in upon our first hours together. I found myself longing for the word of praise which my forethought had surely earned.

At last we entered, with our own latchkey, watched by the landlady and her daughter through the curtains of their parlour. The landlord was one of the last of the old horse-bus drivers. He never reached home until after midnight, and then never sober. His womenfolk only washed on Sundays, and never cleaned the windows at all. But I noticed no dirty windows that day. It was for me the start of a new life; a life without subterfuge, a poor life, perhaps, but one in which I was more than willing to do my bit and make good.

We mounted to our floor, and flinging open the door I stood aside, expectant. The kettle was steaming away, the fire cast cosy gleams upon the Utrecht velvet of the second-hand suite. It looked actually rich in that kindly light. I opened the cupboard, revealing groceries, bread, a bit of steak, even vegetables and butter. The teapot stood warming inside the fender. . . .

"They might ha' papered it," remarked my lady.

A slight chill seemed to creep up my back; but I went on to show her the kitchen, and then the tiny bedroom. The bed just fitted in from wall to wall, taking up one half of the room; the washstand and dressing-table filled all the rest except for a square measuring four feet each way. I had thought that big enough to undress in, for it was bigger than some ship's cabins in which I had managed to live quite comfortably.

"How am I going to make that bed?" demanded my lady.

Still, it was fine to experience the feeling of possession. My high expectations were slightly flattened, but I had not gone so far to let a trifling head-wind spoil my voyage at the outset. We cooked and ate our supper, and then unpacked my lady's gear. Next we took a walk through the Park, and discussed our brighter future. I should say, I talked about it; for I discovered in my wife an appalling depth of shallowness which shocked me more than a little. I had known her at the Institute, where she could swap backchat with a dozen lads at once, and more than hold her own in the exchange of raw jokes; but when I would have spoken of the future . . .

"What's the good of worrying about that?" she wanted to know. "You got a good job; let's be satisfied with that for a start. I know all about fellows as are too big for their boots. Never come to no good, they don't."

Perhaps there was something in that. I dropped the subject of the future and came back to the present, determined to make our launching as smooth as possible. I felt sure that when we had settled down to housekeeping all shipshape, and I returned to the subject, she would meet me more readily. It was nice, anyhow, to know that I would never meet a dissatisfied woman when I came home after a hard day at the warehouse.

That night I heard some astounding opinions concerning the relations between the sexes; and when we faced each other across the breakfast-table in the morning I asked her quietly:

"Please tell me why you married me—why you ever married at all?"

"Not for that, you may be sure! Nobody but a dirty beast would expect a girl to do that."

"It's going to be difficult," I said as gently as I could. "Have you thought of the trouble we'll have right from the start?"

"I don't care about trouble, as long as you leave me alone."

"Will you go home for a month, and ask your mother's advice?"

"What? Ask her about that? What do you take me for? I wouldn't ask nobody about it, leave alone my mother. And why should I go home? Look at what people 'd say."

When I went back to work, I walked the two miles to White-chapel, having decided to save the two shillings a week in tram-fares and put it into the housekeeping funds. I gave up my pipe, which was a real sacrifice, and saved another shilling. I pondered over these things as I tramped the streets, asking myself what I had got in return. As I walked, however, the fog of doubt cleared, and during a hard day's work I recovered much of my optimism. I decided to leave my wife to herself for a week or so, and try to draw us closer together by comradeship. After all, we had seen very little of each other; we had to get acquainted. We could afford no amusements which cost money. I could never quite understand how my mates at the warehouse managed to go to shows. They bought lunches, too, which I could not afford without using money which was needed at home. I regretted neither of these things on my own account, if I could only make a happy home. I had never known a happy home in my life, which may have been my own fault but was nevertheless a fact.

Work ended late that night. On the loading floor there was no such thing as overtime—that is, paid overtime. Loaders worked until the vans were despatched, and at the week-end the hours of overtime were added up and we were given equivalent time off. A bit of extra pay would have been far more just and welcome. Who wanted a whole day off on Saturday, or even a week-end starting at noon on Friday, when he earned so little money that he dared do nothing with his idle time but walk about? The motto of the firm was "Industry and Patience," and now I saw how apt it was.

After six o'clock I started to walk home all freshened up in mind and ready to meet my partner with a happy smile. We had arranged that she should come to meet me, and I had made the directions clear and unmistakable. She was to walk to Whitechapel Road, turn to the right and follow the tram-lines, crossing over to the left side of the road at the big hospital, and keep on towards Aldgate. Since I was late, I expected to meet her somewhere near Wonderland. But I arrived home without seeing her, and she turned up an hour later, tired and angry.

"You came a different way to what you told me!" she said, and accused me of deliberately misleading her to pay her out for our trouble of the night before. I let her cool down, and presently learnt that she had gone precisely the opposite way to that which I had indicated. Missing every leading mark, she had nevertheless gone blithely on, refusing to inquire her way, and all my cheerful attempts to make a joke of it only made matters worse.

At the end of a month something had to be done. The home was kept clean, the meals cooked nicely, and the food far better than I expected to get on my wages. But I had not needed a wife to secure those things. As for being a wife, the woman was as stubborn as a mule, and apparently as sexless. After another mild row I offered to let her have the furniture, and allow her one-third of my income as long as I lived if she would agree to a separation.

"You can't get rid of me that easy," she said. "You married me, and I'm not going."

Again I accepted the situation. Perhaps I was as big a fool as she, though in a different way; but I really did yearn for a home, and still hoped that time would work a miracle. Procur-ing books from the Library, I settled down to evening study, for I had to do something to keep my mind from other things.

"What are you wasting your time with silly books for?" my partner wanted to know then. She snatched up one and glanced through it. "You can't understand this stuff, I'm sure."

"I'm learning," I said patiently. "I'm hoping some day to better myself."

"Yes, so's you can leave me, I suppose," she flared up. "Fat chance you'll have."

After we had carried on in this way for three months a holiday came along, and we went to visit an old Navy man with whom I had struck up an acquaintance in the warehouse.

Bill Mason lived in Brixton, and we walked all the way to his place to save money, so that we might have a shilling to spend and be able to ride home. He lived in a tiny house off Cornwall Road, and when we got inside there was scarcely room to move; but there was jollity there and congenial chat. We had beer—the first I had drunk since my marriage—and many a cuffer we spun over it of deep-sea doings. Just before we left for home Bill produced some gin, and we put it in the beer to make a strong nightcap. It acted amazingly. My wife laughed all the way home; she even grew affectionate. It was time to improve the shining hour.

Everything seemed right with the best of worlds.

But when the moment had passed, she was ashamed of herself for being caught in a weak mood. She remained a wife under protest, and reluctantly I resigned myself to a married life without thrills, without happiness, without hope.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### INDUSTRY AND PATIENCE!

OCCASIONALLY one missed a white-jacket man and saw him reappear with a black coat and white collar. That meant that the lad knew the buyer for a big retailer, or went to the same chapel as one of the directors. There was a lot of graft in the firm. If you knew one of the salesroom force, you could often get a plate of salmon, or a bit of groceries, after the buyers left. There was a small shop for employees near the warehouse, and now and then a lot of inferior bits of bacon or cheese were sent to the shop for the employees to buy cheaply. Invariably there were favoured ones who got tipped off ahead of the others, and what was left for the late-comers was not much of a bargain. Sometimes in the warehouse a man would try to load too many cheese on his truck, and one would fall off and burst. It was difficult to fit all the bits together, and so a lump of cheese often went adrift. I have also known a case of Irish eggs to fall, and it is impossible to count smashed eggs. Now and then all were not smashed. There were fat and lean weeks.

The firm dealt in a tremendous amount of foreign produce: Siberian butter in casks, Danish butter in firkins, Dutch cheese, Edam and Gouda, which was not remarkable, since it was sold as such; but the thing that always seemed queer to me was the altering of brands and marks. When work was slack on the loading floor, the two junior loaders were sometimes sent to the 'empties' store to help. Loads of Alaska salmon were deposited there in a big bare room behind the 'empties' floor, and we had to strip the labels from the tins and wrap them again in labels with the firm's own brand on them, scrape the cases clean, and stencil them with the firm's own lettering. I don't know much about the devious ways of big business, but I do know that thousands of the firm's customers thought

that the firm owned its own fisheries and canning plants, and innocently believed that they were supporting home industries.

When I had worked for the firm for a year, I went to the manager and asked for a chance at better work. I told him I didn't want to push a truck all my life, with nothing in view beyond a yearly increase of a shilling a week, which was the almost invariable rule for white-jacket men and stopped at thirty-five shillings. He very courteously told me that every man in the warehouse was always under scrutiny, and that promotion was strictly according to merit. When I remarked that I did not agree with him, and that I knew two men at least who were utterly and without prejudice half-wits, yet who were right in line for promotion, the interview came to an abrupt end.

"If it were a matter of your health, we might make an exception in your case," he said. "You are not in ill-health?"

"Not bodily health," I answered shortly.

"Then I advise you to return to your work and trust us to know when a change is desirable."

Thus it went on, until I had been a year and a half married; then one day my wife told me sullenly that she was going to have a baby. I leapt for joy at the news. Now we would know real happiness. All the early difficulties would be rolled away on the tide of parenthood which must unite us beyond all uncertainty. I gathered her to me, and murmured nice things to her.

"You don't think I'm going to have it, do you?" she almost screamed, pulling away. "Me have a squalling kid? Not if I know it!"

"Of course you will," I said gently. "It'll be the making of us."

"Yes, *you* ain't having it! Nor shall I. I'll fall downstairs; I'll drown myself first."

That period of my wife's pregnancy was horrible, but I still hoped and believed that as the time drew near she would experience the glory of parenthood. As for me, I knew it already; I looked forward to it with all my heart. She did not

go the length of falling downstairs or trying to drown herself, but she became bitter and gloomy as the days wore on, until I began to dread the event as much as she did. To make things as easy as I could, I found fresh rooms, in the same road but in a nicer, newer house, at a shilling a week more rent. In the new place we still had but three rooms, but there was running water upstairs, and a sink, and the paper on the walls did not hang loose. My wife liked the new place, but liked the prospect of the child no better than ever.

The baby came. There was no money for doctors, nor in those days was there any 'panel' or subsidy for poor people too proud to apply for poor-relief. We engaged a fat midwife, who slept with my wife, while I slept for two weeks on three chairs in the kitchen. I loved that baby mite with a love that kept me trembling. She was a poor, weak little thing, but with such beauty as I never saw on a human face. She *must* bring us together, I thought. The old busman's wife came to see her, and said she would never live because she had a line down between her eyebrows. But I knew that she would live, and bring me happiness.

She had far to travel. When she was about three months old I came home one night and heard her screaming. That seemed strange, for she was a quiet, easy baby, far more given to smiling than crying. When I opened the kitchen door, anxious to hear the trouble, I saw my wife sitting with the baby on her lap. The mite was black in the face, choking, and above the screaming I heard:

"Damn the kid, shut up! Oh, damn the kid!"

Instinctively I snatched the child, turned it over, and it was sick. Then it smiled up at me, its trouble over. The woman still sat, sullen and resentful, and in swift fury I lifted her with my free arm and hurled her against the door, splitting it from top to bottom. In a moment I was contrite.

"Please don't ever give me cause to do that again," I pleaded. "Please."

Matters went on without much change. At my work I saw less prospect than ever ahead, and one or two men who had entered the firm when I did left for jobs with a better future.

I might have secured advancement had I gone to John Hanks, perhaps, but I had never felt easy at having got my job through him, and would not use him further. At home, however, the little girl improved rapidly, growing into a lovely child with the sweetest nature imaginable and the prettiest ways. Some clothes from Oxford enabled us to dress her nicely, and then her mother seemed to develop a certain pride in her. She was something to show and be proud of. The mother was pretty in a physical way, so that they made a nice picture out walking together, and people turned to look at them.

Home never became the place I had longed for. My wife, while in Oxford, had envied folks who left to go to London, but now she was there she hated it. She declared there was never anything to see there; the London papers never had anything in them—which meant, in her language, there was no news of the people whom she had known at home. Oxford news, if any, concerned people who lived on the higher plane, and that meant only people who were “too big for their boots.” My evenings were spent in adoring and playing with my little girl, and when she had been put to bed I went to my books, seeing little hope of ever making use of what they taught me. I began to polish up my navigation in secret, and often was on the point of visiting the docks; but always hope stopped me—hope, and the little girl.

At the warehouse there were frequent ‘whip-rounds’ for men who were getting married, and a shilling was expected of every man. Even now I cannot understand how it was done, for I could give up nothing else; I neither smoked nor drank a glass of ale, and I alone of the white-jacket men walked to and from work in all weathers. When those shillings were taken from me, the home lost it. I very soon felt myself sinking. I adopted the usual habit of the other men and shaved twice a week instead of daily. My clothes were disgraceful, until I appealed to Father for his old ones, and for two bitter London winters I had no overcoat. For all that, as the little girl began to toddle I had to confess that the home was cosy—it was worth everything. For a time we were almost happy; but it was not the life I had hoped for. It was not at all what I wanted my

child to grow up in, yet I saw no outlet. Looking ahead, all I could see was a vista of interminable years, of pushing a truck, watching my girl grow up to adolescence in a poor school and then going to work in a factory or office.

We managed to go home for our summer holiday, when the child was a year old. It cost only our fares, because Father had us to stay with him, and though he was very ill it gave him quite a kick to handle his first grandchild. He often spoke of what I had missed in refusing to go into his shop.

"It's no good talking about that now," I said. "If you feel able to quit, why not give Harry a chance, poor devil?"

"He's a fool!" was the reply to that.

"He must be!" I retorted, and the subject was dropped.

A few months later I received a letter in London telling me that Father was hopelessly ill and wanted me to go home. He had told the ship-owner that he could not carry on any longer, and had suggested that I be offered the management of the business. If I would agree, there was the job waiting for me, and if I would go to the ship-owner and discuss it, I could go home when I liked, the sooner the better.

Overtime was due to me at the warehouse, so I took the week-end off and went to see the ship-owner. Apparently I made a favourable impression on the gentleman, for he was willing to give me the chance, though quite frank about the prospects.

"The business has run down through your father's illness," he said. "The salary won't be much, but I'm sure the business can be built up again, and your father seems confident that you can do it. I have a great respect for his judgment. You can take twenty-eight shillings a week to begin with, and of course there's the commission. It seems to be a good opportunity for you."

"What does the commission amount to?" I asked, a bit knocked backward by the salary.

"It's been as much as fifty pounds a year. It's less now, but you can work it up, I'm sure. You'll take half of it while your father lives, and all of it afterwards, of course."

"I'll talk it over with my wife, and let you know on Monday," I said.

My news aroused a lot of enthusiasm at home. The wages were as much as I was earning in London, and everybody knew that living in Oxford was cheaper. Then there was that bonus, very handy at the end of the year. My wife saw all the advantages much more clearly than I. We would have our friends—which meant of course her friends, since I had none. I'd be a fool to turn it down, she insisted. After much cogitation I agreed with her, and on Monday I saw the ship-owner again.

"If I take that job, sir, what becomes of Harry Ellis?" I inquired.

"You won't want him, of course?"

"I won't take the job if it means chucking him out," I said definitely.

"Oh, keep him if you like, but I'd have thought you'd find it a bit embarrassing."

"He'll be my only reason for refusing. If I don't take the job, will he get it?"

"Good Lord, no!"

I thought old England was truly a funny place for her sons. Harry's job in Oxford seemed pretty much the same as mine in London. Oh, well, perhaps I could do something to make his poor job better, even though I climbed over his head to do so!

"Very well, sir, I'll take it," I told the ship-owner.

"Make it as soon as you can," he urged. "Your father is awfully seedy."

I gave notice at the warehouse at once, and the next week we left our Hackney home. I borrowed five pounds from my brother to pay for moving the furniture, and off we started on another journey—a journey with hope at the far end of it.

We were more like a family just then than at any time since our marriage.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### MANAGER !

My father spent a week in showing me the ropes, after which he never again entered the shop.

It may seem queer that I should so quickly arrive at an understanding of the business, but the shop was not a busy one, all selling prices had been marked up on the various shelves, and Harry was competent enough as a shopman. The matter of buying, estimating, and setting prices was simply one of reckoning costs of materials and labour, and adding fifty per cent. to the total. Materials could be costed through invoices, while the men at the ropewalk kept their own time, apportioning it to the various jobs done. I first of all assured them, as I did Harry, that as soon as I was in full control I would try to make their jobs better, and by that I secured their interest. There was also a boy at the ropewalk, who turned the spinning-wheel and helped generally, at five shillings a week. One man, an expert dresser and spinner, who made the best bellropes in England, earned a pound a week ; the other man, who made tarpaulins and doormats, earned eighteen shillings and sixpence a week. All worked from six in the morning till six at night, with half an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. Harry earned a pound a week and worked from eight until seven.

My job was not a tremendously swell one, perhaps, but it carried a bit of dignity. I was all for dignity. My arm had been troubling me a lot while pushing a truck and handling heavy weights ; but now it would have a rest and a chance to heal. The ropemaking I found intensely interesting, and learnt the way of it easily, for I was used to ropes ; but I could not fathom the problem of making a profit. On our books were such names as the Earl of Jersey, the Duke of Marlborough, Sir William Harcourt, Sir George Dashwood,

and many others of like importance. Most of them paid their accounts once a year, and nobody paid oftener than once a quarter. In buying, however, I found that I must pay my bills in thirty days to have a small discount, and in three months if I would escape being 'Stubbsed.' The shop takings amounted to just enough to pay wages together with the weekly two pounds collected by the widow of the late owner; but often the takings fell short of even that small amount. Moreover, there was no capital; when I was introduced to the bank as the new manager, there was a balance of less than fifty pounds. My poor studies in London had showed me how to arrive at a statement, and on examining the books on my first Saturday night I found that the yearly bonus paid to my father had been as much as eighty pounds, but recently had dwindled to a quarter of that. It was obvious that the business had grown mouldy.

The shop window was darkened by a wire screen on which the name and products of the firm were painted in heavy gold lettering. Daylight scarcely entered the shop at any time. Then from hooks outside the window were hung halters, cart-ropes, hammocks, and horse clothing, still further excluding the light. A stack of cart-whips stood in the open doorway, and made a convenient substitute for a lamp-post for all the stray dogs of the street. I mentioned to my father that the window ought to be opened up to make the place more attractive, and I suggested the substitution of electric light for the naked gaslights.

"Don't run before you can walk," was the retort. "That shop has been run that way for over a hundred years. Young ideas are not always wise ones."

I removed the gloomy wire screen without further argument, had the windows cleaned, and put in shelves for the display of our goods. Harry shook his head, seeing revolution in my new ideas. But the shop now saw a bit of sunlight, which showed up the cobwebs; a thorough cleaning followed, dislodging the dust of a century, and when the counter was cleared of a lot of tarry stuff, occasionally a lady dropped in for a ball of string. I also made Harry wrap stout brown



paper round the butts of the whips, and change it daily. Poor Harry! If this was making his job better, I'd better have stayed away. All that extra work. . . .

I didn't spare myself, either. I spent my Thursday half-holidays cycling out to distant farms, drumming up trade for next market-day. It often meant drinking with a difficult customer, but other tradesmen did that and got the business, so I did as they did. I dared not yet increase wages, for my father still wanted to know about everything I did, and he seemed uneasy at my talk of improvements. He might take it into his head to come and look things over, and I did not want that, for his sake as well as for mine. His wife, however, often stepped into the shop, and her eagle eye missed nothing. She always appeared friendly, but I suspected her.

For a while my domestic affairs were easy. My little girl was growing up splendidly, and her mother now seemed glad that she had her. I had hoped to form a small circle of congenial friends, for we now had a nice little house all to ourselves, with a bit of garden, and nobody but ourselves owned a latchkey to it. My wife's mother was dead, and my own people's house was hardly in a condition to welcome visitors, though we called as often as seemed advisable. Father was now in the hands of a quack, who rented him an expensive apparatus for pumping fragrances into his lungs. He showed distinct evidence of mental decay; but when I mentioned this to any of his intimates I was regarded with horror, and told in plain terms that if I knew God's mercy better I would know that He would never take His spirit from so good a man as my father.

Our visitors, then, were for the most part my wife's brothers and sister, who were excellent people, doubtless, but not quite the sort I wanted for our sole acquaintance while our little girl was growing up. One brother was a navvy on the Great Western Railway, one a ferryman at a boat-house, the other an under-scout at a college. The sister was a youngster without a thought above domestic service. Domestic service is an honourable one, while the work the brothers earned their

living at was no worse than I had done myself ; but none of them wanted anything better, and their speech and habits were in keeping with their ambitions. I had tried by kindly persuasion to induce my wife to improve her own manner of speech, entirely on our little girl's account, but my plea never earned more than a derisive laugh. Again I heard the old accusation that I was too big for my boots—I was, in short, stuck up. Some of the cruder habits, however, were suppressed while we were alone, only to break out boisterously when her relations came to call on us. Then I was noisily taunted to the tune:

“He don’t like it. Thinks we’re a lot of roughs, he does.”

When I had been in Oxford a few months, Father definitely changed for the worse. For a week I stayed beside him, sleeping on a chair in his room. Beyond all argument he was now insane. He could not lie down, but dozed sitting up in bed. On the night that he died his wife and Lydia and I were with him, and he passed away horribly, as little like one of God’s creatures as could be imagined. Only Lydia, his youngest sister, cried.

The Oddfellows wanted to make the funeral a dress procession, and the Salvation Army wanted to send the band, but I declined both offers, determined that Father’s funeral should not be a circus parade. My stepmother was furious, but I was in command now, and the poor old fellow was buried at least with decorum.

After the funeral relatives stayed to hear the reading of the will, and while we waited for the legal gentleman, crowded into a tiny room, one of my uncles, a very pious man, gazed at the picture of *The Light of the World* on the wall, and presently surprised everybody by saying:

“They never ought to have painted a sacred picture like that all wrong.”

“How can you say such a thing, Charles?” protested the widow.

“He wouldn’t walk as easy as that with them wounds on his feet,” said Charles, solemnly.

“If he could walk at all after hanging all night on a cross,

he ought to be able to dance," I put in roughly, and everybody stared at me in horror.

"Ah, you're a bad 'un!" said my stepmother with a toss of the head. "You always was different. I'm sure I don't know what poor Robert was thinking about to have you home again, that I don't."

It was too bad if any of those relations expected to profit by Father's will. There was a small house, worth about £240; a tiny cottage at Boar's Hill, worth £40; the furniture, worth what it might fetch; insurance, Oddfellow's benefit, and cash totalling in all less than £100. Everything was left to the widow for her use during her widowhood or lifetime if she did not marry again; what remained after she had done with it was to be divided between my brother and half-brother and sister and myself. There was also a share in a small basket-shop, which was the widow's entirely.

There was a lot of grumbling. It takes very little money to set relatives growling if they have no share in it. For my part I had expected nothing, so was not disappointed. By the time the widow had done with it there would be little left even if she married again soon. That she would marry I thought certain, for she was a lusty female, of a fertile family, and none of the female side of it had ever shown the least aversion to men.

Immediately after the funeral I took stock at the shop, then sent the books up to London, where the ship-owner's own accountant drew up a balance-sheet. The stock at the shop was a simple matter; but when I began to take stock at the ropewalk I had a shock.

On the books I had noticed the total value of last year's assets, and wondered at some of the items. Much of our business was done with farmers, renting out to them tarpaulins to cover ricks while waiting for the thatcher. It was a fairly lucrative line, but considering the listed number of tarpaulins we had in stock and the number hired out, I had often found that we were unable to meet an order for a cloth when the records suggested that we ought to have several in stock. When I found a huge pile of tarpaulins hidden away under a shed

at the ropewalk, rotten, stuck together, utterly worthless even as junk, I asked:

"Why are they kept?"

"Your father always took 'em in stock," said Bill, the tarpaulin man. "They been here as long as I have, and that's a year or two. They ain't no use—rotten." Bill stuck a finger in a hole and the fabric crumbled.

"Burn them up!" I ordered. They did not go into stock that year.

When the books had gone up, I received a letter promptly, asking me to account for the tremendous drop in stock value, a drop which practically wiped out all profit for the year. I suggested that somebody come down to look things over, and in response the ship-owner's brother appeared on his motor-cycle. I told him several things, and he looked gloomy.

"You should have done it gradually," he said. "It halves the book stock."

"But it isn't stock, and never should have appeared as stock," I retorted. "If I'm to do my best with this ancient ruin of a business I don't want any falsification of books, and it's just that, putting down rubbish as valuable material."

"You'll be the biggest loser by it," he remarked.

"I'll stand that. The whole business wants washing up. You can't expect me to meet competition if I hang on to the mouldy methods of a century ago. I've already given the men a few shillings more wages to enable them to live as human beings. I've let them start work at eight instead of six. They could never do anything at that ungodly hour, dark as it is under the sheds. They're doing better work, and I have no trouble with them at all."

The man looked at me curiously. He was a kindly soul at heart, but I suppose he had been so drenched with big business that decency towards men was only a Sunday habit.

"As long as Mrs S. gets her two quid a week, we don't mind much what you do," he said. "But that simply has got to be paid, and we're putting no money into the business. Go ahead with your improvements—out of earnings," he con-

cluded. As he started to run with his motor-bike to get it going, he called back:

"Good luck!"

The bonus that year amounted to twelve pounds, and I took the widow's moiety to her. She sniffed as she counted it.

"I thought so!" she commented. "Your father never had less than twenty in his worst year. I knew he was doing a silly thing when he let you have that job."

"He ought to have got much less, many years," I answered.

"That's like you! You never behaved like a son to him. Now he's gone I suppose it can't be expected that you'll speak like a son about him. I expect you'll get more next year, when I'm not to get a share. . . ."

As soon as possible after that I moved to North Oxford. There I need not see the widow unless I wanted to. My hours of business were subject to no rule but my own, and though I spent little time actually at the shop, I put in long hours at work in other ways. Weekly I haunted the corn and cattle markets, and spent time and money buying lunches and drinks for possible customers; but I soon discovered what a canny bird the small farmer can be—he ate my food and drank my beer, and very likely dealt elsewhere in the end. I was not a success at that sort of business. Such trade as had always come to the shop still came, and quite a number of new customers found us out now that we had brightened up the window. We retained and increased the considerable business of laying and cleaning matting at the Bodleian and Radcliffe Camera, and supplying doormats and coalsacks to the Museum and Colleges. I sought out new avenues of trade.

The firm enjoyed a fine reputation for their bellropes, had in fact been awarded an Exhibition Gold Medal for them, and had supplied ropes for most of the famous peals in the kingdom. I sat down and wrote to every church whose address I could find, trying to drum up renewals. I secured many orders—one for Old Christ Church, Philadelphia, U.S.A.—and for a while hope soared high, but bellropes last a very long time, and it would be many a year before more were wanted. We were

noted for a sound quality of handmade rope, and I managed to land an order for a ton of it for China, and at once visions of an export trade danced before my weakening eyes. But I had cut prices to land that order, there was no profit in it, nor did other orders follow. We had a yearly contract for the ferry-rope at Marston, and in my innocence I invented a rope which would last longer. My rope of mixed sisal and manilla lasted all the time I was in Oxford, and looked like lasting for ever. That was another bad bit of business. Honesty is *not* the best policy. My new ideas were bringing strange results.

At the end of my second year, when I saw the balance-sheet, I wondered what the future held for me. There was little real profit, and though the statement showed that I was entitled to draw nine pounds for my commission, there was not nine pounds in cash in the whole show, which seemed very mysterious to me. With the statement came a letter advising me to give Harry the sack and take on a boy to save wages. When I objected, down came the ship-owner himself to do the dirty work. Poor Harry had to go, and where on earth that helpless fellow was to find work I could not imagine. He had to break up his little home, and send his wife and children to live with her parents. It made me feel sick. As soon as that weekly two pounds for Mrs S. was no longer called for, I could easily foresee my finish, for I had no doubt I should be discarded as callously as Harry, once the business ceased to have its use. There was less ahead for me than if I had remained in Whitechapel.

I began to drink too much; not at first during the daytime, for the one joy I still had in life was that hour spent with my little girl before she went to bed; but after she had kissed me good-night I left the house, and rarely returned until the pubs closed. After Harry was sacked I hired a boy fresh from school, and I had to stick to the shop all day until the lad learnt prices and how to serve customers. By the time I quitted Market Street after such a day I was fed up to the teeth.

Our second daughter was born about this time, and this new arrival brought a spell of happiness to me, for my wife ac-

cepted motherhood now in the proper way. All might have been well had I been content to settle down on her level; but the elder girl was beginning to chatter, and it was her mother's speech that she learnt. It wasn't good enough, and I don't hold myself a prig for thinking so. The little time I was able to devote to putting it right was not enough to counteract what had been learnt in my absence.

I had made a few friends in North Oxford, and had joined the Conservative Club. My friends visited us, but after a while they only came if I was at home. They ceased calling on my wife, who, on her side, had made no friends at all outside the circle of her family. Very soon it became the rule that her folks entered our house and I left it at the same time, which did not help matters.

Another shop in our line now opened right opposite to us. The proprietor had a large following among 'Varsity men and farmers, having been long established in the City as a livery stable owner. He was a good enough fellow, but being in the trade to make money, and having money wherewith to make more, he cut into my business sorely. I wrote my principal, begging that he help me to expand a little; but he told me that I ought to be able to do much better than I was doing, and that I must carry on. Soon after this I found that the new lad in the shop was very thick with the widow, and always went in to see her after he left work, taking a full report of my doings, which she in turn forwarded to London.

My only hope was to find better prospects, and I felt justified in doing so while I was still employed as manager in an old-established concern. I wrote letters to the merchants from whom we bought goods, and very foolishly omitted to keep those letters private. The lad copied all correspondence on gelatine, and of course copied mine, carrying the news to the widow. One day a smart little Jewish traveller called, to collect a long overdue bill, and, failing to get cash, cleverly lured me into naming the real principal of the business.

One morning I went out after a big order which would boost our takings tremendously, and a lot of liquor flowed

before I landed it. A bit of fuddling was well done to get such results, I felt sure. I returned to the shop, feeling that I was on top of the world, and there I found the ship-owner himself waiting for me. He peered at me, and sniffed, then he went to work on me. I had neglected the business. I had got drunk. A London firm had sent a man to the ship-owner's office dunning him for a bill which I ought to have paid long since.

I mentioned that order secured that morning against strong competition, pleading that what I had done was in the best interests of the business. I told him that I spent many more hours in the office than I ever did at home, and had tried my best to bolster up a rotten concern.

"You have been writing for another position without consulting me," the ship-owner said acidly.

"What else can I do, with a family to provide for?" I demanded. "I see no future here—though there could be, if you cared a damn. Look at the books and see for yourself what I've done."

"You're not sober now," he retorted. "I won't stand that. You had better go, and follow up those letters you've been writing for jobs."

There was no argument. He gave me five pounds, and suggested that I had better leave immediately. I had just enough liquor aboard to tell him a few sharp home truths, then off I went, possessing only a fiver in the world, owing instalments on furniture, and wanting a drink as I never wanted one before. I never had that drink, however, but went straight home and told my wife the truth without trying to excuse myself.

"I never did trust that woman," she said to me. "We must make the best of it. You'll soon get something else, don't worry."

How good that sounded! Now that the trouble was at our door there was no reproach, no complaining, no word of anything but hope and comfort. Losing my living seemed almost a pleasant thing. We went for a walk with our children, and enjoyed our first real communion in years.



## CHAPTER XXV

### HARD TIMES

MY first move was to try to realize on my inheritance. I would have sold the lot for twenty pounds; but nobody would make an offer, and that possible source of capital failed. I asked the Witney uncle to lend me thirty pounds, and he wrote me very kindly that his son was getting married and of course one must take care of one's own first. I knew that he was right. I would have said the same.

Among my friends was the manager of a big steam laundry, and to him I went. I don't think he took me seriously when I told him I was broke, out of work, and needed a job, but he offered to let me go out after bad accounts if I liked. Lord knows Oxford is no stranger to bad accounts! A lot of laundry work comes from lodging-house keepers, and they, poor devils, know the toil of collecting their dues from some of the wild undergrads at the end of term. The laundry found it as hard to get washing bills from the harassed landladies. I went forth in all my desperate need, and braved the ogress in her den. Blood cannot be drawn from a stone. In the first week I earned on commission four-and-threepence. The next week I went out after big accounts only, and earned ten bob. Such an increase heartened me. I sold a fishing-rod that week for half a sovereign, and that made the income a pound. Not so bad. But I had to sell my bicycle to pay the rent, and after that must walk my rounds. Headington, Botley, Hinksey, even to Kidlington I walked, often to find that the bill had been paid to a recently discharged collector, who had omitted to write off the item. In a month I reached the end of the collectable bills, and on top of that I was asked to see a solicitor who represented most of the shareholders of the laundry.

"We expect our collectors to be bonded, and to present references," I was told. I had neither references nor bondsman. I told the man the simple truth.

"H'm! Drink! Afraid we can't let you go on. Sorry."

"But I don't drink now," I pleaded. "If I wanted to, I could not afford it. Besides, I've had my lesson. Give me a chance."

"If it were only myself—h'm. I'm afraid it's no use. Sorry."

I had one friend in Summertown who, without asking, lent me five pounds. That was one bit of tangible friendship which I have never forgotten. He asked for no security, but I insisted on giving a written promise to pay. He was a man who never went to church, despised people who did so for reasons outside worship, and liked to drink a sociable pint in the evenings. He said nothing about my failure, never mouthed platitudes, handed me the fiver shyly and wished me luck. His thoughtful act enabled me to carry on without making plain to the world the facts of my fall. I still kept my home, and the little girls never lacked anything that mattered. But when bills were paid, little remained of that precious fiver. I visited the office of the insurance company in which my father had been insured. I was insured there too, for a penny a week ever since my birth; my girls were in for a like amount.

"Situation? References? I knew your father, of course. Aren't you filling his old position?"

Again I told the exact truth.

"Hah! Drink! That's bad. I couldn't take the responsibility. You see, you'd be handling money."

"Are you suggesting that I'm dishonest?" I barked.

"Not at all. I am simply explaining my position. If I gave you a book to collect, my chief would demand an explanation. Sorry."

The Conservative Club held a sort of country fair at Summertown, and through one of the committee I was permitted to run the "bowling for a pig" show. For that I received five shillings and a drink or two. Nobody seemed to think I needed a meal, but I could have got splendidly drunk had I wished to. I did not, but took home the five bob gratefully. My wife's brother and his wife were there, and they gave me a queer look. Pretty soon it was crystal-clear to me why my

wife had seemed so understanding when I first told her of my being sacked. She saw the proof of all her own convictions, that I had been too big for my boots and my feet were pinched at last. Her relatives held the same view, and were there to offer help. For that they should be blessed.

What they offered, however, was not so easily accepted. They suggested that we sell up, go and share their already crowded home, while I look for work, forgetting ambition and all else. Much as I appreciated the offer—and I truly did appreciate it—there were objections. I had my house on lease, I still owed money on my furniture—or on most of the new stuff—and I lacked the moral guts to go to the landlord and the furniture people and state my position. I could only say, sincerely, that I was grateful and would think it over. My wife had never liked our place in North Oxford. It was too respectable. She saw nobody in the neighbourhood who stood at their front gates in their aprons gossiping. Nobody up there shouted bawdy witticisms across the street. She flared out at me for still expecting to make a success of anything better than she would have been satisfied with. She said something about letting my children starve while I loafed about with my ‘toff’ friends, expecting them to find a job for me.

“Give me a little more time,” I suggested. “If I see nothing else in a very little while I’ll do as you ask me.”

I wrote to the Salvation Army in Victoria Street, stating my exact situation, sparing myself nothing. I mentioned my own early connexion with the Army, and inquired about their Colonial scheme. I knew they made a big parade of their helping hand to the down-and-out. I don’t remember at this date just what reason they gave, but they could not help me in any way. I was glad, at heart, for I had hated myself from the moment I dropped the letter in the box, for asking help of people with whom I felt no fellowship. Desperation for my little girls’ sakes had driven me to take that step.

From time to time I had received letters from the United States, where one of my Savannah Line shipmates was working in an office and had a good job on the strength of his cricket skill. Cricket was taking a hold in New York and Philadelphia

at about that time. Anybody who could score runs or take wickets was sure of a nice salary with one or other of the wealthy business men who had taken a fancy to the new game. I knew nothing about cricket, except that I thought it the slowest game on earth next to professional baseball, but my correspondent had more than once assured me that he could get me a good job through his own influence. Just when I was at a dead end at home I received a letter from him repeating his suggestion that I move over there, where a man had a chance according to his merits, regardless of what he had been or done. A quarter's rent was due, and two instalments on the furniture. I took a walk around Islip, Kidlington, and Yarnton, and that, as anybody knows, is walk enough to settle the rockiest problem. When I returned home, tired out and hungry, I had made up my mind. I told my wife that she and the children could go to her brother's house to stay, that I meant to leave the house as it was, except for our clothing and bedding, for landlord and other creditors to save what they could of their dues, and I would take my bare fare to Southampton, and work my way to America to try my luck in fresh fields.

"What! Leave everything?" shouted my wife.

"I owe more than it will cover," I urged. "I don't want to run away leaving debts, and this seems to be the best way out."

"What about us? You don't mind leaving your children to sponge on my brother!"

"I thought you wanted to go there. You're not going to sponge, either. I shall be as careful to repay him as I am to leave something for the others I owe money to. If I had a public sale here the stuff wouldn't bring any more than I should at once have to pay out, and you'd suffer the publicity as well. Please do as I suggest."

I left the house and said good-bye to as many friends as I could find. At the White Hart, where I had belonged to a little Social Club, the landlord pressed a half-sovereign upon me. Dick Money unobtrusively wished me luck and gave me back my written promise to repay that five pounds. There was more real feeling among those dear old clubmen than I found in anybody else in Oxford. I returned home late in the evening,

and found my wife's brothers there with a handcart loaded with all the gear to be shifted, and a lot more. The children were dressed for leaving, for I had decided that they had better depart at once, leaving me to make an early start in the morning. My little girls were in high glee. They were visiting Uncle, and Daddy was going off to America to make his fortune. America in their geography was no more distant than Binsey. The elder girl gave me a flower, and the baby gravely handed me her most precious, most dirty, rag dolly. Then they gave me wet kisses, and cheerfully set off south, calling back that I was to send for them soon.

While I was stuffing a few clothes into a bag, two men from the Social Club appeared. They wanted me to pay a last visit to the club and let them drink to my good fortune. The house was very empty, and I was glad to go with them. I took along with me as a parting gift a stuffed kestrel, which the club still possessed when I returned twenty-one years later. The members of a little football club, which I had in my poor way helped, were there in force. If I hadn't drunk all the beer they pressed on me I'd have blubbered. Dick Money walked back home with me at chucking-out time, and quietly asked if I had cash enough. I had the White Hart landlord's ten bob, which would see me to Southampton, and that must be enough. Had I more, it would have gone into my wife's purse, for I had confidence in her to make the most of her poor capital. She always did that. No matter how horrible our relations might be towards each other, she never did less than the very best with the means at our disposal.

As I neared Southampton, my problem seemed to become less terrible. All the tall stories I had ever heard of rapid fortunes in America took on the similitude of truth. Only when I could smell the sea did I begin to ponder on my procedure. When I left the train I possessed very little more than a shilling, but the day was young, and I would proceed at once to the docks. I put my bag in a cheap lodging-house, paying sixpence in advance for that night's lodging. For threepence I bought apples, and ate a good filling lunch of them; then off I went to the offices of the American Line, which I knew would be

taking on extra stewards for the busy season. This line took English stewards, though under the American flag, for Britons are cheaper than Americans, and Americans don't make good stewards—the work's beneath them. It was the busy season for passengers coming east, and I hoped for the best. Not until I entered the office did I come to a decision regarding my approach. I asked for a berth.

“Discharges?”

I said that I had been living ashore, had been manager of a business that had let me down. But I had been in good British ships and also in American ships. Undoubtedly the line was expecting big business, for I was taken on as a saloon waiter in the *Philadelphia*, and told to report in two days. Again counting up my money, I saw myself sleeping outdoors before I joined the ship, and eating grass unless I raised the wind. In my bag was my sextant, bought in hope some time before, and which I still clung to tenaciously. That went into a pawnshop, and I paid for my bed in advance for another night, set aside a few shillings for food, and sent the rest home with a most optimistic letter.

Duly I joined the ship. It was hard going at first, carrying aboard stores and laundry and baggage; but I set my teeth into it and sweated gladly. When the ship sailed, there were few passengers, comparatively; the old hands got the tables, and I was put to work in the scullery, where for seven days I peeled a million potatoes and bathed a million greasy dishes.

The Statue of Liberty hove in view, and I saw the eastern sun gilding her hard face. I had taken on the job of scrubbing the glory-hole coming out, so had received a few pieces of silver from the boys. When most of them had gone ashore, I began to plan my getaway. It would be useless trying to sneak a bag out, so I carefully dressed myself in all the clothes I could hang on me, stuck one or two of my least dispensable books round my waist under my belt, and strolled out through the landing shed trying to look natural.

Luck rode with me. I reached the street safely, kept strolling until I was well across the road, then ducked swiftly down Houston Street, and jumped on a car for Brooklyn Bridge.

About eight o'clock that evening I rang the bell at my friend's address; the door opened; there was a moment of blank astonishment, then I was noisily welcomed.

"Work? Why, my boy, you've done the right thing at last! You can have your pick of jobs here. Sit down. What have you been doing with yourself? Have some lager. I'll take you around to-morrow and introduce you. A job? Easiest thing in the world, my boy!"

I sent home another most optimistic letter that night.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### LAND OF OPPORTUNITY!

My friend's landlady was very good to me. She let me stay there, sleeping on the lounge, and told me not to worry about payment until I was in work.

"One more makes little difference, and I can always stick a bit on to George's bill," she said coolly.

The first day's experience with George introducing me to prospective employers was eye-opening. The men he introduced me to were members of his cricket club, and so far as I could see his own job laid little claim to his time, for he spent the whole morning with me and never even 'phoned the office about his absence. He took me to a lawyer, who also sold paper milk-bottles. I was introduced to him as a cricketer from Oxford. I quickly put that right, and said that I knew nothing whatever about cricket but had played a little Soccer.

"Ah," said the legal light, "we are thinking of starting a Soccer side for our young members. You can help us when we start."

"But I want work," I said. "I'm not a good enough player at any game to be useful in sport."

"I see. Well, give me a ring now and then. I may hear of something. So-long, George, you old loafer."

American business methods seemed queer. Next we visited a gentleman in Central Park West, who was the inventor of a new cable code. He welcomed George with dignity, offered us cigarettes, and after a lot of cricket chat listened to my request for work.

"I haven't any jobs, of course, but if you like to take my code around to the big firms and try to interest them in it, I can pay a big commission."

I looked through a copy, and saw little hope of ever grasping the code sufficiently to talk about it to people whom I knew



intimately. How to approach utterly strange business men in a strange land was beyond me. I said I'd take a copy home, if I might, and study it, then let the gentleman know if I felt I could secure business for him. He was very nice, and gave me two copies.

"George," I said, when we got outside, "these men are very kind, and doubtless fine friends of yours; but what I want is a job, at a wage, no matter how small. I have two little girls at home depending on me for their food."

"Sure, my boy," said George. "I'll take you right down to B.'s, where the manager is a friend of mine. We'll get a good drink there, too."

The manager of B.'s was as nice as the others. He gave us cigars and whisky, talked about cricket, spun dirty yarns, and slapped George on the back. I mentioned a job. He subsided at once into the cold business man.

"Ah, a position. Leave your number, and I'll give you a ring. We are often in need of men. No, sorry, there's nothing at present."

Here, too, George had foolishly introduced me as a cricketer from Oxford. When we left I told George very plainly that I could not afford to waste time like this, that I was not a cricketer, nor did I want any job which depended on my skill in anything but my work.

"You've got to do it here, boy. Chuck a bluff. Let 'em think you're good. Once land your job, and even when they find you're not a cricketer they'll hardly chuck you out."

No ring came for a week. Every morning of that first week George took me around to similar places. Lord knew what sort of job he had himself, for he seemed to care little whether he showed up or not. Yet he received a good salary, and was generous in spending it. He insisted on buying tobacco for me; he spent freely in drinks; in the evenings he would have taken me to a show, had I cared to go. But I was in no mood for shows. I wanted work.

Mrs G., the landlady, sent me with a note to the principal of a business college. I saw the gentleman, who was very kind. He said that if I liked to take a course at his school for three

months he might be able to recommend me for a position, and I could pay him when I got the money. That was of little use to me. The good lady also sent me to a telegraph office where her younger son had once worked. There I stood in line, a man nearing forty, with a hundred young boys just out of school, trying for a job as night-messenger. The man here was very kind. All American business men are very kind. He didn't smile at my request, though the boys kept up a rapid fire of comment on my age and appearance. I heard "Gran'pa" more than once. I left that place hurriedly.

Several afternoons I wandered along West Street and South Street, looking at the ships. Resolutely I turned back. I had put the sea behind me. Only in the last desperate resort would I cross a ship's gangway again, for I definitely was not cut out for a flunkey, and as for the navigating branch, I knew that was hopeless. I was unable to read the number on a street door without going close up to it and standing on tiptoe. George was full of hope every night, but nothing ever came of it, and he seemed incapable of understanding that a man with a family could worry himself about it. I remarked to him that in his letters he urged me to come out, assuring me that jobs were ready to fall like ripe pears into one's lap.

"Well, my boy, you have to watch your chance," he said.

After a month of this I went again to B.'s, saw the manager, and put my case plainly to him. I told him I didn't expect a fine position right away, but any job where I could earn a small wage and perhaps prove my fitness for a better.

This time there were no cigars or whisky, but the man did grasp my position. He gave me a card to the grocery department, which I presented in the cellar. Here I made much of my experience in London, and the foreman seemed impressed. I found right through American business that a man is taken largely at his own valuation; references are not often demanded, but the man is expected to make good in his work. I leapt at the chance, and was put to work packing groceries at ten dollars a week. That seemed to me to be a good beginning, for it was equivalent to two pounds; I was soon to find that ten dollars and two pounds are vastly different, for while a man

may support his family fairly decently on two pounds, yet ten dollars is a pittance, barely sufficient to support a single man in New York.

B.'s was not a high-class store, but it was a very big one. There was plenty of work to do, and I found that I could do it a bit better than the other men on the packing-bench. London methods and New York methods differ very much. In New York, hustle the stuff out and take a chance on it arriving safely; in London, pack securely, and carry on until the work's done. Thoroughness was no bar to swiftness, I discovered, and when I had been there nearly a week the cellar foreman moved me up the bench a couple of places. All seemed right with the world then.

It was far too good to last. One morning I had to pack some evaporated apricots in an order, and, going to the case in use, found the cellar cat with a nice new batch of kittens. I refused to put those apricots into my customer's order, and nothing that the foreman said could budge me. Doubtless the man who took my job was not so finicky. I was out of my job almost as soon as I got it, and drew my wages with misgiving. Out of the few dollars I received I sent five dollars home immediately, then went to my lodging and told my sad tale.

Visiting the house was an old Nottinghamshire cricket professional, Tom Butler, who was making a good living in America as an insurance agent. He was after business then; but when I told him of my experience at B.'s he showed interest in my predicament.

"That sort of job's no good," he said contemptuously. "Can you sell things?"

"I'll sell spectacles to a blind man if there's a living in it," I said desperately. "I've managed a shop."

"Oh, a shop! That's no use, either. To make real money you must work on a good commission, then what you earn is up to you. No man ever gets anywhere on wages. Come with me. I'll get you something in no time."

How I shuddered at that promise! But I followed old Tom to New York, he paying the fares, and in the Tribune Building was introduced to Mr Ulrich B. Soule, who was the New York

sales manager for the Saalfield Publishing Company, of Akron, Ohio, publishers of a new *Webster's Dictionary*. The little office was crowded with prosperous men, each carrying his sample satchel. I had found so many men 'nice' to me that I feared this very nice Mr Soule. But he was sincere.

"We put advertising in the Sunday papers," he explained; "then from the replies we get addresses, and our representatives call on the inquirers with sample pages of our dictionary and take orders. Our instalment plan is very fair, and the representative gets what deposit he can persuade them to pay, and anything from one to five dollars he keeps for himself towards his commission. You earn money from the start, and the better binding you sell the higher your commission. Some of our men are making fifty dollars a week, and they only work evenings. That's the best time. People are home then."

"I made enough in one year to buy me a good insurance book," Tom Butler put in.

It sounded splendid to me. I said I'd like to try it. Mr U. B. Soule said "Fine!" and handed me a sheaf of postcards received in reply to the advertising. He frankly told me that these were prospects which other men declined to take on, coming from poor districts.

"I'm trying you out. If you land two orders from this dozen you'll soon be one of my best men. If you don't sell one, I shall not worry much, but I hope you will. I know you will."

I examined all the literature given me, sitting on a sunny bench in Battery Park. Winter was coming on, Christmas would soon be here, and I could see a fine chance of sending home a lot of money for the little girls. I studied my prospects hard. There was one thing about the literature, and method generally, which I liked very little. The advertising was worded in such a way as to give a strong first impression that anybody answering would be given a fine new five-dollar atlas. Of course, the atlas was a gift, but only to purchasers of the dictionary. The advertising merely invited readers to fill in the coupon and get a free atlas. Surprisingly I discovered that there are many silly folks who really expect something of value for nothing.

I speedily found out that my prospects were definitely in that class. Among the poorer inhabitants of upper New York I spent a thrilling evening. Lady Luck once more smiled upon me, for the very first address I went to held a *bona fide* prospect, a lad studying at night-school, who had vaguely guessed that the atlas was only to be given to buyers of the dictionary, which he really wanted. I got a contract signed, and a dollar deposit paid, on a sheepskin binding at sixteen dollars. That bit of good fortune coming at the start heartened me to survive the many profane and abusive people whom I saw next. The ninth prospect also was good, though I could not get the deposit or have the contract signed until next day. But I had practically secured two orders—one certainly, and I believed the other was good—and I went home to Brooklyn that night walking on air.

George was loudly enthusiastic, taking credit to himself because he knew Tom Butler. He at once offered to buy a dictionary, signed the contract, and paid me one dollar. When I went to see Mr Soule next day and handed in my two orders, reporting another yet to come, he leapt to his feet, introduced me to all the other men, and clapped me on the back heartily. I was going to be a star salesman. I went after that deferred prospect and secured the order, actually getting a two-dollar deposit for a twenty-dollar binding, and began to calculate my week's earnings. I badly needed an overcoat, for when winter did arrive it would come quickly. If I could make four dollars as easily as I had made those, and keep it up, I could see my week's earnings rising to super-tax figures.

Things were not that easy, however. Immediately I was taken on the sales force I was asked to choose a district. All of New York and environs was divided into sections, and none but the man allocated to it peddled in a section. My ignorance of New York was sublime, my innocence complete. I think my initial success rather made some of the older hands uneasy, for a nice little elderly gentleman who was among the top sawyers suggested that I take the Lennox Avenue district. He showed me figures which proved that shoals of inquiries came in. I had to get my own advertising distributed, as we all did. We took as many folders as we thought we wanted on Friday

morning, and then went round to the news-stalls and tried to get the newsagent to insert a folder into each Sunday paper. The newsagent charged about a dollar a hundred for inserting the folders and delivering the papers; we had to trust entirely to his honesty. I took only one hundred that first week, because I had no more money to spare; but I believed I could secure at least twenty orders, and next week I'd take five hundred folders. Each man put a key mark on his own folders, which of course were only distributed in his chosen district. I waited impatiently for the first returns from my district. On Tuesday morning all the salesmen were in the office picking out their prospects. There were an astonishing number for me, I think over forty; and the men congratulated me. I may have seen their smiles, I don't remember; but I never suspected the reason for their noisy praise until I strolled around the Lennox Avenue section to mark down the addresses in daylight. It was useless paying visits until evening, but I could see better by day.

It was a negro section! Streets, house doors, shops, all full of black people. I began to see the joke; knew the reason for that very big percentage of replies. I refused to be discouraged, believing that negroes need to improve their minds as much as white folk. How foolish! I tramped the district that night for four hours, and never got an order. Everywhere I went I was compelled to explain the ambiguous wording of the advertisement. Towards the end of my rounds a tremendous buck nigger flourished the damned card before my face, following me down the passage, and bellowing that he wanted that atlas and no fooling. I told him to go to the office for it, and considered myself lucky to escape with my throat uncut.

I reported next day after noon. Mr Soule looked displeased.

"Look here, mister, you musn't tell people to come here with complaints," he said shrilly. "I've had to get the cops to throw out a big nigger who said you sent him here after an atlas. That won't do, my friend."

"Then you ought to modify that advertising," I said. "Six out of ten of the sort of people who read the trashy Sunday papers of this city expect to get that atlas for nothing. If they didn't, they wouldn't bother to send in the card."

"Our records prove you are wrong. But don't do that again. I think you chose badly in taking that district. I suggest you try New Jersey next week. New York is pretty well covered. If you had asked my advice, I'd have warned you against Lennox Avenue. Go ahead this week with these"—handing me another sheaf of hard ones. "You did splendidly with the others I gave you. I know you're going to make good."

In brief, I worked New Jersey. In my first month I made five dollars, of which I had to pay one back to the office because George failed to meet his first instalment and the dictionary was taken away from him. All dear George said about it was: "Oh, well, my boy, it gave you a start, didn't it? You don't need to worry now."

Snow came. Christmas was at hand. I had sent home bits of cash which were pitiful in New York, but where shillings meant money they were vitally important. In New Jersey the walking beat me. I spared nothing for fares except on the ferry, where I couldn't help paying; in the suburbs of Jersey City and Hoboken I tramped for mile after weary mile, lugging a fifteen-pound sample case as well as the page literature. I had the dictionary charged against my account, feeling sure that I could sell the whole work where I might fail to land a prospect on pages and sales talk. But New Jersey was as bad as Lennox Avenue. Doors were slammed in my face; dogs set on to me; men told me I was a grafter; women called me a crook, shaking before me that doubly-to-be-damned advertisement. Small children, seeing me chased away from houses, fired rocks and slush at me; and after all I must trudge back to the ferry.

I kept to the city thereafter, Jersey City and Hoboken, and the week before Christmas I really earned seven dollars. I sent home four, with a cheery letter; paid two on account of my landlady's bill, and kept a dollar in my pocket. George sprang a new prospect on me. A real trier was George. He knew a man who had a soft night job, and could easily get me extra work if I wanted it.

"Come and see him, anyway," said George. "You might make money enough to give up selling dictionaries. Have all day to yourself then, and get about and meet people."

## LAND OF OPPORTUNITY!

I saw the man. He washed automobile trucks and vans at Gimbel's garage. The work was all done after the vans came in, and must be finished before they were taken out in the morning. It was no trouble to land that job. I was taken on at ten dollars a week, to work from six o'clock until the job was done. The hours rather upset my plans, for I had intended to carry on with the dictionary as well; but ten dollars a week, with no chance of increase, scarcely satisfied me; it was at best a hobo's job, and still a long way from what I hoped to get. I asked Mr Soule's advice, not telling him, of course, about the night work. I had an idea that schools were good prospects, and I could work them during school hours. Soule was enthusiastic. He went to a lot of bother to get addresses for me—then suddenly looked blank.

"But they'll be closed for the holidays," he said. I too felt blank. Then he smiled. "But if I can get the addresses of the principals—they'll be home during the day, mostly."

I slept on the afternoon before taking up my garage job, and did a good stroke of work on the vans that night. Fresh the next afternoon, I called on some school-ma'rms and talked dictionary to them. They lived widely apart, those dear ladies; and after I had talked for an hour, finding them most intelligent listeners, they would quietly inform me that they thought it a fine work, that they would certainly recommend it to the school authorities, but they were unable to buy for the schools themselves.

After the heaviest snowfall of the year I tramped out to Orange and paid four calls. One dear young thing gave me tea, and seemed anxious to hear more about the dictionary at some near date; I trudged back to New York, parked my satchel in the office, and ate ten cents' worth of baked beans for my supper before going to my car-washing.

Tired nature rebelled. I had not slept more than two hours in any day for a week. I finished my polishing of one car before the hoseman had another ready for me, and climbed into the dark interior to rest for a while. There I fell asleep, and was roughly awakened to find I had slept for three hours and the men had believed I had gone. It took but a minute to tell



me that my job was finished. I drew the few dollars due to me, and walked to Brooklyn through the drizzly night.

Then next day the dictionary office shut down. Some other new book of greater popular appeal was in preparation. I was again on the sidewalks of New York with steady work and a home as far off as ever.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### LANDED !

I SEEMED to be for ever chasing the horizon, with never a peep over the rim. While I walked the icy streets of New York that winter, shivering in my second-hand summer overcoat which was all I could contrive to afford, I searched myself for reasons. Why was it that I could not go ahead? On the only occasion when I definitely went adrift from the straight course, buying another man's papers and taking his name, all had gone swimmingly; I had achieved command of ocean-going vessels, and, but for an accident no more in my power to prevent than is the sunrise, I might by now command a ship of importance. When I had tried hard to make good on my own name and footing, trying all sorts of unpleasant, hateful jobs, none of my efforts brought me much profit. I might have remained a flunkey but for my rarely aroused but undeniably red temper. Of course I could have stayed at the grocery warehouse all my life, with "Industry and Patience" as my motto, and probably would have done so had not the chance offered to become a manager. Was that my trouble? Ambition? I could not blame myself for getting chucked out of B.'s. If that was the way they did business my finish must have come sooner, or later in any case. Sheer human frailty, fatigue, sent me to sleep in that van of Gimbel's. Getting fired out of that job did not greatly hurt my pride, I'm afraid. When I reached that point in my self-searching, I paused. Here was I, down and out, with those two small girls across the Atlantic believing in me and expecting to join me when I had made my fortune; living on what amounted to the charity of folks towards whom I felt a mild superiority; and I could not hold a simple job because something or other happened which failed to please my superior taste. If ambition kept me under, then

why not drown it? It was of far more importance, after all, for me to have those small girls with me, to watch them growing up, to miss no moment of their delightful companionship, than to be president of the biggest concern on Wall Street. In my heart I still clung to the hope that some day I would make a home for them in which they could develop into something infinitely better than me; I wanted them to know none of my own childhood bitterness, none of the grinding poverty of the class from which I had sprung. None the less, here I was, little better than a hobo, unable to send them the few shillings needed to buy the barest necessities.

Off I went, as fast as I could walk to an agency which I knew engaged waiters for special affairs. I stood in line with a hundred flat-footed ex-butlers, ex-footmen, ex-stewards, seeking any job that offered. Perhaps these men, most of them discharged house-servants, possessed little in the world besides a dress-suit and a thirst for musty ale; I had smothered thirst, I possessed no dress-suit nor money to hire one. But if I could get the job, time enough then to worry about the suit. I slowly got to the desk. The man looked at me curiously. He knew every one of New York's itinerant flunkeys, and I was a new one.

"Ship's steward," I offered. "Want to work ashore."

"Give you a night's work at the Knickerbocker Athletic Club," he said. "Dollar. You'll make ten. Got a dress-suit?"

"Sure," I answered. "What time?"

"Six-thoity. One buck, please." He held out his hand. Of course he wanted his commission in advance, with that sort of folk. I had no dollar. I reddened. Men behind me were shoving. If I didn't want a job, let men get there who did. Almost my only remaining piece of property worth anything was a presentation gold watch, which I had clung to desperately. I was about to turn away when I remembered my decision to let nothing stand in my way. I produced the watch.

"I'll bring you the dollar first thing in the morning. You can hold this as security. It's worth a hundred dollars at least. I need that job."

## LANDED!

The watch was taken quickly, and I got my chit. Then when I got outside I damned myself for an impetuous idiot. I ought to have pawned that ticker, and then I'd have had money enough to eat with as well as hire a dress-suit. Of course, I might have missed the job. It was better the way I had done it. But how to get that suit? Near the agency were several little dens where waiters could hire suits, and I asked in one of them the cost. A dollar. Nothing seemed less than a dollar in this dollar land. Even a night's work was a dollar. I offered to leave my overcoat as security.

"Dis ain't a hock-shop, mister. Go ant hock yer coat, den you kin hire yer suit."

It was bitterly cold. I waited about in a railway-station until it was nearly time to appear at the club, then pawned my overcoat, taking no more than the dollar I needed, and hired my dress-suit. The problem then arose of white shirt, collar, and white tie. I had not thought of those necessary accompaniments to correct waiter's rig. The little Jew had collars and ties, but no shirts. He was a kind little man. He offered to let me owe him for collar and tie until I returned the suit, but still there was the shirt. He must have felt sorry for me, shivering there with no overcoat.

"'Ere, feller," he offered, "vere yer vaitin'?" I told him. "Huh!" he grunted. "Dem fellers dond't vear svell shoits. I gif yer a sheet o' vite paper. 'Ere, I show yer."

He showed me, fixed me up with a splendid shirt-front of glossy white paper, warned me not to crumple it, then watched me start off, rubbing his fat little hands before his fat little belly. He earned a lot of marks from Fader Apra'am for that kind action, I'm sure.

That was a big night at the Kpickerbocker Club. Bob Fitzsimmons was the star attraction, looking beautifully uncomfortable in a full dress-suit, his freckled, cheery grin and big freckled fists contrasting queerly with the faces and hands of the members. Sigourney, billiards champion, was there. Franklin Roosevelt was there, very much less dignified than he later became. The dining-room was crowded, service was of the rush variety, I had hopes of doing so well that I could

recover both my watch and coat; but chiefly I wished to do so well that the head waiter, Harry Prothero, would want me again. Perhaps I might land a steady job. Before dinner the extra waiters filled butter-bowls with ice and little pats of butter, filled soup-plates with cracked ice and placed half-dozens of oysters on them ready for the rush, carried piles of cold plates to service tables and pitchers of ice-water to dining tables, then ate all they wanted of a huge pot of Hungarian goulash. I ate as much as I could hold, perhaps the first really complete meal I had enjoyed for weeks. My lodgings were still open to me, but I was aware of a strained atmosphere there, and I never ate more than would keep me from falling in the street. Yes, I must certainly land a job here. If waiters expected to make ten dollars in tips and could eat their fill of good grub like that, wages meant nothing. Ambition over the left shoulder, I thought. Here was work with a hope.

I was a new hand. Older, better-known waiters had their tables filled first. I saw one waiter take a dollar bill for a tip after serving two men with a quick meal. Hope soared. At the next lot of tables to mine another waiter also had empty chairs, and he was a regular extra. I couldn't grumble if my tables filled slowly. Presently the head waiter came down the room steering a gentleman who had quite a load on. He looked jolly, and the Wop at the next tables to mine pulled out a chair in readiness. But the man was brought to my table, and the head waiter settled him securely in his chair and told me to look after the gentleman nicely. The happy one grinned up at me and said: "Hullo, Willie, h'are ya?"

Much better than getting some pompous old member without a grin in his kit, I thought, as I presented the *menu*, which was waved aside.

"No, Willie. Wha' I wan' is a big, big Scotch highball. Then I wan' a big, big, red, red, bloody red steak. An' I wan' a big Scotch highball, an'—'n——'at'll do f'r a start, Willie."

There was a bit of humour in it, no doubt. I got the

## LANDED!

whisky, put in the order for the steak, and while waiting for the call from the kitchen was kept busy fetching more drinks. I believed the man could never eat, could never even see food; but I was in error. The steak came, and he sent it back. Too well done. It was bloody. The head waiter drifted along, heard the row, and took the steak away himself. If the member were so important that Harry Prothero could find time to bother with him, I could not do wrong by indulging his whims. The Wop at the next tables never took his eyes off me and my diner. He looked black and sullen. His tables were gradually filled with one party, and as he passed me on his way to the kitchen I heard him cursing about them. They were a committee of some sort concerned with the evening's festivities, and no committee-man ever tipped a waiter.

The second steak arrived, and was satisfactory. I had to bring more whisky, and when I got back from the bar the man had hacked a bit of red meat out of the centre of the big thick steak and apparently swallowed it; but mushrooms, potatoes, all the rest of the expensive meal, including the steak, lay untouched. I asked if I might serve it for him.

"Serve it, Willie? Y're slow. I've—I've—had it! Get me a liqueur brandy, and give 's a hand as far as—as—elevator. I like you—Willie."

He spilt the brandy and upset most of the things on the table as I tried to steer him past. The Wop watched us depart, and he gave me no loving look. When I got my diner to the elevator, he handed me a crumpled dollar bill, vowed again that he liked me, and fell into the elevator with a crash. I hurried back to my station, hoping for more like him. The Wop followed me out when I cleared my table. Beside the service elevator he caught my arm and started to mutter unpleasant things, among which I gathered that he had always secured that jovial diner, and felt that I had robbed him of a dollar. I made some sort of answer, going about my business, feeling too happy to bother much about him. I had already made one dollar, I would be paid another dollar for my night's work, and my belly was comfortably full. Why wouldn't I feel happy?

"English son of a bitch!" was breathed into my ear. I swung around at that. I was never a fighting man, but I never liked that epithet. I never used it. If I wanted to call a man a bastard I'd do it in English.

"Son of a bitch!" said my Wop again. I dropped my armful of dirty gear on a table, picked up a huge bowl of ice and butter waiting for whoever needed it, and crowned the Wop with it. The bowl burst, he was drowned in ice-water and jewelled with butter-pats; in his astonishment he stepped backward and fell down the service elevator shaft, landing on top of the car two floors below.

Panic seized me. I saw nobody near; but I knew that somebody might appear at any moment. Looking over the well, I saw the Wop moving about on the top of the car, shaking his head, bleeding, but cursing venomously. He was not killed, at any rate. I ran down the back stairs to lend him a hand; but when I reached the chill little alley in the basement where the elevator stopped, I saw the operator, another Wop, climbing on to the car and exchanging rapid chat with my victim. They would make their case good. Birds of a feather. What chance did I stand of contesting a charge of murderous assault? That was the trend of their excited chatter. The locker room was near by. I dare not risk getting into trouble. That would completely destroy any chance I had in the world. The whole affair spelt police to my excited imagination; and I wanted none of America's police attentions. I ran to my locker, changed into my street suit, and left that club by the cellar flap at my very best cross-country speed. It was early, and I found the little Jew's shop still open. He took a few cents out of my dollar for the collar and tie, and examined the suit while I was counting my change.

"Any time yer want a suit——" he screamed after me, but I was on my way to Brooklyn, fearing at every step to hear the shrill of police-whistles, the clang of the Black Maria or her American sister.

There were suggestions at my lodgings that my room was wanted as soon as I could quit. I didn't blame the landlady.

She had done more for me than I had any right to expect of a stranger even though she did, as she told me, stick a bit on to George's bill to square things up. I left the house early the next morning, and walking over Brooklyn Bridge in the rush hour I waited for somebody to drop his morning paper. It was freezing hard, and I needed the paper to put inside my coat. Going over the bridge, I nearly fell with the bitter cold, for a gale blew up East River like a Cape Horn snorter. Two papers fell to my hand before I reached New York side, though the gale carried many out of reach. I ducked into the public convenience in City Hall Park to pad my clothing, and I kept out the advertising pages for perusal. There were only the usual daily columns of 'want ads,' which seemed never to vary. Most of them were put in by agencies, and useless to me. I had tried agencies, and they all, like the waiters' agency, wanted fees in advance, except when sending a servant to a house on a monthly job. I even thought of trying that; but I must earn money, not take most of my wages in comfortable accommodation. That would keep me, doubtless, but it wouldn't bring my girls to me.

Glancing over the rest of the paper, I happened upon a report of some police proceedings. I don't know what urged me to look twice, or to read to the end; but there was a rather pitiful case of delinquency, and a certain lady was mentioned as having helped a thankless one on many occasions. The lady was named, and the magistrate had thanked her publicly in court. I read that lady's name with a strange qualm. Pride? I had lost my pride. Who was I to have such an expensive luxury as pride? I then and there stamped upon every last vestige of it. It could never revive. I stuffed the paper into my pocket, hurried to find a telephone booth, and from the directory I took the address of the lady. It was in Brooklyn; so off I trotted across that howling bridge again, warmed now because of my newspaper wadding.

At the lady's house I felt terrified. It took me fifteen minutes to make up my mind, then another ten to arouse my courage. But I managed it, the door was opened, and I stammered out my request to see Mrs von P. Perhaps I



looked sufficiently war-worn to impress the neat maid, for I was asked to wait in the hall, and presently the lady appeared. She made me feel like a whipped dog. Kind? Yes, but with that in her manner which told me that she had helped many a lame dog which later bit her. I hurried to tell her my tale.

It wasn't a begging yarn, not at all; but a plain statement of my need, of my girls' need, and of my unsuccess in getting steady work. I asked her to send me to an employer who could judge for himself of my worthiness. She glanced at my clothes, and my shoes, which boasted no rubbers though the streets were ankle-deep in slush. I hastened to tell the lady that I had an overcoat, and would get it out of pawn with the first dollar I earned. She seemed to be swaying over to my side, so I kept silent after that, and I let the tale sink in.

"I'll give you a card," she said presently. Take it to 25 Broad Street, and see Mr B. If he can, he will give you something to do, I'm sure. Please don't let me down. I don't think you will."

She didn't offer me money, for which I was grateful. Once more I crossed that mile-long bridge, but the gale seemed almost balmy now. Broad Street was quite near to the bridge-end, and I found Number 25, a vast building of twenty stories with floor-space of acres in extent. On an upper floor I found my man, and sent in my chit. As soon as he saw the name on it, he regarded me kindly but curiously. Later, I discovered that the wife of one of the firm's chiefs was associated with my lady in doing similar good work. He asked me questions, not about my past or my present dilemma, but what could I do? What work had I been used to? I told him that I had been manager of a small manufactory, but had not done very well. He nodded, again looking me over, and doubtless believing that I had emphatically *not* done very well.

"I suppose you need work at once?" he said. "Can you start now?"

"This minute, sir!" I said, all a-twitter with excitement.

"Very well. You can work under the porter—twelve dollars a week to begin with—and if you make good, we'll see about something better. Do you need a little money?"

"No, sir," I said hastily, strong in the possession of my change for a dollar, and wanting to keep my first week's wages intact. But he was wiser than I.

"You can't run about New York without a coat in winter," he remarked. "Have you a coat?"

"It's in pawn, sir—only for a dollar," I told him.

"You'd better draw two dollars from the cashier. Here, Alfred!" A middle-aged youngster appeared, looking very contented. Mr B. told him to take me to the cashier, and then to show me the work. As he left us, he called out that I must get my overcoat in the lunch hour.

Alfred took me around in leisurely fashion. Behind the vast offices was a store-room.

"This is where you can rest between calls," he said. "You get here at eight in the morning, and you have to run the vacuum sweeper over all the carpets in the main office, fill all the inkwells, change blotters, and keep the water-coolers filled. It's all got to be done before nine. During the day you supply anything anybody asks for out of this store. See?" He opened some sliding lockers and showed me more stationery stock than I ever saw in a retail shop. "It's a soft job. You can loaf in here for hours."

I was too grateful for a job really to understand much that Alfred said about loafing. I didn't mean to loaf. Rather, as soon as I had got the hang of the job and felt that I was giving satisfaction, I would go to Mr B. and ask if he minded my using my spare time for study, and, if I might, what he would advise me to study. But I said nothing of that to Alfred, who appeared to be the sort of man who would loaf his way through life in an easy job rather than not.

I got out my overcoat, finished my first day's work, and went home to my diggings with my head in the air. Twelve dollars! Let's see: I could send home a pound—that's five dollars; pay Mrs C. five, which would settle my week's account and wipe off a dollar of back dues; and have two

whole dollars for myself with which gradually to clothe myself adequately.

I burst in upon the family at supper, and my face must have encouraged them to put on a brighter aspect. I told them my great news.

"Jesus Christ!" exclaimed the eldest son. "That's one of the swellest firms in New York! You lucky sucker! How in hell did you ever land there?"

"Oh, just some of that get-up-and-hustle you've been telling me to use. I got it out of the paper," I said loftily.

"Well, I'm a son of a bitch!" said George.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### REUNION

THE big bosses of the corporation for which I now worked were lavish of broken cigars. Their ashtrays were often full of good, unused leaf, which smoked splendidly in a pipe and saved me tobacco money. It was no hardship, after some of the weed I had cheerfully smoked at sea. When I drew my first full week's wages, I felt like a millionaire in the making, and went about my humble duties with gladness. Already I could see the time drawing near when I could send home passage-money for my family. My letters were worth writing at last.

Apparently I was making good. In a few weeks Alfred was transferred to another job, and I got his; not, at present, at higher wages, but with a definite promise of advancement if I carried on as I was going. About the third week I went to recover my watch. I had bought myself new shoes, and had got my overcoat out of pawn. I ran up the agency stairs, a far different fellow from the one who went there before hunting for any sort of job. A new man sat at the desk, and I asked after the one I had seen before, describing him since I knew no name.

"Aw, he's left here," I was told indifferently.

"Left? Where's he gone? I want to see him personally.

"Soich me, buddy. I bought the business off him. Guess he's spending the dough at Pa'm Beach," said the man with a grin.

Well, there went my watch. After the first moment of rage I felt little real loss; my feet were on sound ground, and what was a watch compared with what I had in prospect? Washing it out as a loss, I went back to work and forgot it.

In an unguarded moment I told one of the office staff some of my sea experiences; at once an interest sprang up,

and my store-room often had visitors. I liked the young fellows; they had none of our English reticence or shyness; when a man liked you he not only wanted to know all about you, but without asking told you all about himself, his family, and his views on everything. Soon the higher lights began to visit me. One day the Big Chief himself drifted into the store-room, and I found myself sweating. What had I done now? I had been very civil, very industrious, and Mr B. had agreed to my suggestion that I utilize my spare time in study. When Mr N. appeared, I was drawing up an imaginary statement showing profit and loss in my store-room had it been a shop. Mr N. made no comment; nor did he more than glance at my books and foolscap, though both were from the store-room stock. He was a big man, not much older than me, with kind eyes shining behind rimless glasses, and he held a fat cigarette in his fingers.

"I hear you've been a sailor," he said.

"Yes, sir, for several years."

"What were you doing?"

"Master," I said, before I could take a hitch with my silly tongue. Quickly I added: "My eyesight failed. I gave it up years ago."

"I don't think this work is the best for you." My heart sank. He had come to show me the door, I was convinced. He went on easily: "I hear good accounts of you. Your family are in England, aren't they?"

"Yes, sir. I was hoping to save enough to send for them, if I can hang on to this job."

"Perhaps I can help you." Now my heart leapt. I made my gaze meet his. "I've a place out at Oyster Bay. I live there all summer. There's a launch to take me into the rail-road depot every morning. The house is on an island. My skipper's left me. I wasn't satisfied with him. He seemed to think the launch was for his convenience, not mine. Do you want to take on the job?"

I did not want anything to do with boats. I wanted to stay in a solid business where I could see my goal ahead and work for it. I said so, as definitely as I could without giving

offence to so powerful a personage. He lit another cigarette, appeared altogether indifferent to what I had said, and then announced quietly:

"Try it. I'll take you out on Saturday in the car, and you can look the place over. I want a married man. I'm altering the stables into comfortable living quarters. If you decide to take it on, I'll advance the money to bring out your family. I'll arrange for you to be away on Saturday morning, and you can meet the car at Long Island City. I'll give you a meeting-place later."

The carpets got very casual cleaning that noon. I wandered about the offices in a daze; and my young clerks, who had seen the boss come after me, were curious.

"You ain't fired, are you, buddy?" they asked solicitously.

"Not yet," I answered them one by one. "I'm not sure I won't be, though."

That was my very real fear. Supposing I made a bloomer, failed to see some sea mark, had an accident? My eyes were getting much worse. I hated spectacles with all a sailor's bitter hatred. There was no doubt I ought to go at once and tell Mr N. that I wouldn't accept his offer. He might fire me then. I didn't know what a man should do when a Big Chief showed interest in him. Besides, there was that offer to bring out my family. How many men in my situation would ignore a chance like that? It was what I yearned for with my whole being.

Of course I met the car on Saturday, and drove out to Center Island, Oyster Bay. It was my first motor-ride, and the day was a rarely lovely one of frosty sunshine. We reached the island across a natural sandy causeway, circling a wide bay over which the launch carried Mr N. in summer more swiftly and pleasantly, I suppose, than he could travel by car. I saw a beautiful house in the Elizabethan style, set in lovely grounds, with fishponds and terraces, and a private dock built of white stone. A few hundred yards away from the house was the boatyard, with a beautifully fitted workshop, and a slipway on which stood the launch, a thirty-footer, with cabin and cockpit, at present covered over with its winter housing. Besides the launch there were several rowing-boats and

a sailing St Lawrence skiff, yawl-rigged, with a dagger plate. I was left to inspect the little fleet at my leisure, until the French chauffeur came to fetch me to his quarters for lunch.

Arsène Maison was a robust, red-faced fellow with a vast capacity for red wine, of which he had brought two quarts from his Brooklyn home. He was a jolly soul, and took it for granted that I was to be his summer comrade. He took me round the stables, a huge place like a Newmarket training establishment; but there had been no horses in it since Mr N. bought the estate. The proposed alterations were marked out already, and, when done, that portion of the stables would make a roomy and comfortable dwelling. Maison's little house lay at the other end of the same building, beside his spacious garage. I was favourably impressed, I confess.

On the way back to Brooklyn Mr N. said:

"You can come out at the end of April. There will be a housekeeper here then, and she'll board you. By the time we come out in June I shall see how you're getting on, and if all's well you can send for your family at once. You ought to be able to put the boat in commission by June, I guess?"

"That's not all, Mr N.," I replied. "I know nothing whatever about motors. The rest I can do in shipshape fashion. But I don't want to leave the office. I am content there, and hope I am doing my duty well enough to merit advancement later on. I appreciate your kindness; I do want my family; and I'm prepared to do my best if you insist on my coming out to your summer place. But I should be happier if you gave me your promise that, if I cannot make good, you'll take me back in the office without prejudice. After all, that's the job I already have, and prefer."

If I had made that speech to an Englishman in similar circumstances, probably I'd have been fired out of both jobs without more ado. I am certain that the words I used did not differ in any essential from those I now write. I did not want that boat job. I did want that office job. Of course, I needed my family as they needed me. Mr N. whistled tunelessly for a moment; it was his habit when thinking; then he replied cheerfully:

"No man can give his best when his family is on the other side of the world. When you have them with you, and your little girls are happy out on the Island, I believe you'll be willing to forget the office. If you try your best during the summer, and then tell me you can't carry on, I'll see that you get a job in the office at no worse salary than I shall pay you at my place. That's a bet, then."

What joy went into the fitting out of that launch! Never was paint so completely burnt off, never wood so thoroughly rubbed down. A mechanic came out to assemble the motor and instal it; and when the boat was launched, he gave me lessons in running the machine. It was a simple matter; the near prospect of seeing my girls blinded me to my own semi-blindness. I ran the launch round the Bay until I knew her every trick; there were as yet no other motor-boats in commission, so I had the wide sea to myself, and hit nothing; but once or twice when entering the dock I misjudged distances and came near to mishap. That ought to have definitely warned me to tell Mr N. at once that I couldn't go on. But by that time June was at hand, the gardeners were busy; the house staff came out several days a week; loads of stores arrived, and Maison brought out the second car and left it.

"We shall all be here next week," he told me, over a quart of red wine. "My missus is coming out on Monday. The boss says you are to board with us until your own folks get here."

Before returning to Brooklyn, Mr N. took me aside.

"You've done a first-class job on the boats," he said. "Mr Taylor tells me you'll do." Mr Taylor was the superintendent, and had in an unobtrusive fashion been keeping an eye on me, I gathered. "Now if you'll give me your wife's address, my secretary will send her transportation. How would you like them to travel?"

"I suppose I shall pay in the end, sir. Second cabin, please. I don't want them to come in the steerage."

"I think you're wise," he agreed. "Then suppose we send them two hundred dollars? That ought to see them



through. I shall take ten dollars a month from your salary. How's that strike you?"

"Thank you, sir," was all I could find to say. At that moment Mr N. could have placed me under bond for life.

The family had been in residence for two weeks, and I had run the launch to the boss's complete satisfaction, when the great day arrived. The *Oceanic* was due in New York, and I was given the day off to meet my little party. I was permitted to take the launch and leave it at Oyster Bay, so that I could bring my family and their luggage in one cargo. Mrs Maison had helped me put my house in order; the furniture I obtained in Oyster Bay on the instalment plan. The gardener had set out flowers before my veranda, there were curtains at the windows, and I had bought two small rocking-chairs to set on the porch for my little girls' own use.

Off I started for New York, with money in my pocket, good clothes on my back, a job, a home, and a future.

The first man whom I saw on the *Oceanic's* gangway was Arthur Rumble, who had been a wily hunk in the *China* with me, and a grin spread over his face as he spotted me.

"I've got something for you, Old China," he hailed me. "Come on and get 'em. Had 'em in my sheds. I looked after 'em properly when I recognized the name."

Rumble led me to the second-class saloon, where two small girls were jumping about in their excitement. Their mother sat waiting, regarding me dubiously,\* I thought. I reached them with a run, and all the talking for the next two minutes was done by the girls. No man was ever called "Daddy" so many times in such a space before. Rumble stood for a moment before running off to catch passengers from whom he meant to get tips. Needless to say, he had refused to accept a tip from my folks. My wife still sat, not quite so happy as I believed she ought to look, but staring at me as if in appraisal. Oh, well, it was ten months since we had seen each other, and perhaps there was a shyness. I gathered them all to me, and performed the trifling business that was necessary in those pre-War days, then carried them off ashore.

On the way to Oyster Bay I painted a glowing picture of

the beautiful home I had made for them. My wife had little to say, but I was determined to let nothing cloud my happiness, and said enough for both. I asked after folks at home, and never waited to hear the answer. My girls had grown amazingly: the baby was a sober, black-eyed little witch, with an astonishing explosion of mirth at unexpected moments. The elder girl was as fair as her sister was dark, a sunny child, with charming features, dainty as a sprite, full of healthy vitality. Crossing the bay, my vision was doubly clouded with a strange moisture which persisted in flooding my eyes. How I avoided hitting something I don't know. At last I pointed out the house among the trees, though unable to see it very clearly myself.

"See that tall clump? Well, see the long house near the end? That's ours. It's got a horse on it for a weather-vane."

We landed, and entered our home. I took my wife in my arms and kissed her, murmuring all my plans for a new start towards our happiness. She was not very responsive, but I remembered that we had never been entirely one, and was sure that it was due to shyness which would soon wear off. I proceeded to exhibit the place to them, proudly, and the small girls chased each other through the rooms, jumping and shrieking with delight. I took them out to see the boats, and showed them the one which was kept for our own use. That set the crown on their joy.

After the little ones were snug in their beds that night, I took my wife down by the sea and we sat for a long time in silence. There had never been many things in common between us, and such silences had not been unknown, but somehow I felt that this one was rather marked. However, I thought, better far to have silence than bickering. I let the silence flood me, and put my arm about her. She shivered.

"Come along," I said gently. "You're cold. Let's go in. It's been a tiring day for you."

When I entered our bedroom a little later, I found my wife undressed, sitting on the bedside, and I sat beside her, a little puzzled.

"Don't touch me!" she said in a fierce whisper, glancing at the door of the children's room.

"What on earth is the matter?" I asked, and again tried to put my arm around her. She stood up then, and I looked at her in amazement. Her eyes were hard and bright. My own eyes travelled over her. The truth hit me like a solid blow. I whispered a dazed question.

She nodded, then sat down again, dropped her face in her hands, and was about to burst out in uproar. I patted her shoulder.

"Don't make a row, for God's sake—think of the kiddies!" I said, snatching up her raincoat from a chair. "Here, throw this around you and come outside. Let's talk this over quietly."

She followed me into the fields, and every step for me was like stepping on red-hot spikes. Near the beach I made her sit down.

"I suppose you'll chuck me out now," she presently remarked.

"I expect we shall all be chucked out!" I returned grimly. "Tell me all about it. Tell me the truth."

She told me a rambling tale about a man who had been nice to her, who had told her she was too fine to live in such a place as her brother's house. He had taken her out . . .

I sat stunned. This must surely ruin me with Mr N. Must everything be blown to the winds again just as life seemed to be opening brightly ahead? I had been longing for those small girls until my heart was sore. The foolish little tricks they had been permitted to pick up were not so rooted that I could not eradicate them. They were young, and bright, and happy as young things ought to be, and to break up now seemed terrible. I had to think quickly, for my wife was on the ragged edge of hysterics. I took her hand.

"Try to calm yourself," I soothed her. "No use crying over spilt milk. I'm not going to chuck you out. We have to think of the kiddies. You may depend on me never to mention this again as long as you do the decent thing by me.

To-morrow I'll get advice from a doctor. Come along to bed."

I asked for another day off to get straightened up, and took my wife to New York after seeing a doctor in Oyster Bay who gave me an address. The woman to whom we went relieved me of fifty dollars and within an hour we were on our way back.

For five days I fought to prevent kindly people visiting my wife, earning a name for surliness and unfriendliness. But I dared not admit any woman to that house. Mrs N. met me near the dock, asked kindly after my wife, and said she had no doubt that so much excitement had upset her. She sent over a bottle of port and some fruit, offering to let her personal maid come to tidy up the house for me—an offer which I firmly declined while thanking her sincerely.

She must have thought that English people were queer creatures.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### STILL SEEKING

PERHAPS I was a fool to expect happiness to come of such a union. For a while things seemed to run smoothly; but now that my wife dwelt among servants she took on a peculiar attitude of superiority, refused to visit their servants' hall, and of course was not visited. The chauffeur's wife, a tiny French-woman full of vivacity and kindness, would have been very friendly, but she was a "furriner" and therefore not fit company for a citizen of Oxford's alleys. I tried my best to make our home life happy. During the summer a thunder-storm came suddenly, and I ran to the house, after securing the boat, to see if windows and doors were fastened. I found the woman and kiddies under the bed. It was hopeless to try to persuade the woman of her foolishness; but I was not going to have my girls grow up in that fashion, so I got them out. Luckily they were young, and they must have had courage inherent in them, for within an hour I had them sitting in their rocking-chairs on the porch with me, watching for the flash and counting for the crash, clapping their little hands gleefully when one or other of them counted correctly. They never again showed fear of thunder. Within a week the elder girl had definitely cast off all fear of any description. She killed a four-foot blacksnake with a stick and brought it home, the little one following her proudly, with her great black eyes alight with awe of her sister. Another day the young naturalist came staggering across a field with a great crow in her arms. One wing dragged the ground; the terrifying beak darted at me when I would have taken the crow from her; but the bird never attempted to harm the girl. I believed it was damaged, and she had picked it up when it couldn't escape; but as soon as she freed it the bird flew away easily. Nothing living appeared to have terrors for the girl, nor did living things try to hurt

her. She put her arm down a rat-hole and pulled out a rat, and gave her mother a terrific shock. They had the material, and I believed I could work it into something after my plan.

There were many things to correct. They spoke in the language of the gutter, and had learnt tricks that would disgrace monkeys. Had the woman consented to keep silence while I was correcting them, they would have unlearned such things quickly, for they did want to please me, but she never could refrain from commenting upon my high and mighty ideas, and usually added a word concerning where they had got me. I don't remember precisely what the occasion was, but when thoroughly exasperated one day I quietly reminded her that perhaps she might be wiser to cease opposing me, at least where the children were concerned. She coolly retorted:

"I know what that means. You promised never to mention it. You can't do nothing now, and you know it. You've took me back and you don't dare start anything. You can't never divorce me for that, and the children won't leave me, anyhow."

She ended up by gathering the girls to her, and asking them if they wanted Mother to go away. Of course they blubbered into her apron, and for a day or two I was an outcast. It was very hard.

There was truth, if not justice, in what she said. I avoided all appearance of interference for several days, simply carrying on with my work. Mr N. for the first time found fault with me. There were oil smears on the white paint, the brass was not clean. When he stepped ashore to take his train, I lagged behind while other launchmen went up to the little town for their morning beer. With my face almost touching the boat I looked for those smears, that dull brass, and found every fault Mr N. had pointed out. I hadn't seen them before. I must be almost blind. I went all over the launch again before I did my errands. Returning launchmen chaffed me on my devotion to duty. I cursed them. My morning work, before returning to the island, consisted in carrying down a case of milk, all the goods packages arriving by train for the house, and bringing from the town shops such items as the house needed. All had to be

done while wearing a smart blue uniform, with "Captain" in gold on cap and sleeve. I got home late that day, feeling almost discouraged.

As the summer went on, things at home did not improve, for with the cunning of her kind the woman played up to the limit her awareness of my helplessness; she went out of her way to undo all I had been able to accomplish with the girls; and they, poor little creatures, had been so much more with her than with me that they quite innocently followed her example. It was all I could do to remain passive. Had I beaten the woman—taken her out among the trees and beaten her with a heavy stick—I feel convinced that the animal in her must have responded and we might have lived in some sort of peace; but I did not want a dog for a wife.

I paid Mr N. ten dollars every month, and sent away five dollars to pay off my old board bill, out of sixty dollars wages. Of course I had no rent to pay, and the gardener gave us fruit and vegetables; but I was paying instalments on furniture, and I very soon learnt that Mr N. had paid his other skipper seventy-five dollars—a single man. It seemed to me that I was working hard, living in misery, and under a great show of benevolence my employer was saving money on me. All the other skippers received at least seventy-five dollars a month, some much more. I could never forget Mr N.'s kindness in making it possible for me to bring out my little girls; but I took little comfort in my situation.

I began to drink. Not, as the other launchmen did, as a congenial morning rite before starting back home, but by myself, in another saloon. Men began to talk about me. I was "one o' them snooty Limeys." The other launchmen were Scandinavians. The little things one usually did to help another if in difficulties with a boat were no longer proffered to me. I always had trouble with my motor, knowing merely enough to run it, but knowing nothing whatever about adjusting it. Maison, a real motor expert, was compelled to help me if I asked him; but our women were not speaking, and he was happily married; he dared not be too friendly. He spent hours over my engine, but never made it run. I had to tell Mr N. that

it needed a mechanic; and of course he was deprived of the use of his launch for a week. I saw his face cloud over with annoyance, though he spoke kindly enough.

My motor broke down one day in late summer while in mid-bay on my way to meet his train. Other launches passed me without a sign of interest. When I got the thing going again and reached the station dock, Mr N. had gone home in another man's boat. I was an hour late, covered with motor filth, hands skinned, and temper dangerously frayed. I went up to the saloon and drank many whiskies before starting home. When I entered the house, my wife gave one look at me, and gathered the girls to her.

"Yer daddy's drunk. Don't go near 'im. He's tryin' to ruin us again," she said. As she herded the children into their own bedroom, she turned and told me that Mr N. wanted to see me as soon as I got home. I was just sufficiently fed up to go to the house as I was, dirty, bleeding, and disgusted. Mr N. left the dinner-table to see me, and as soon as his eyes fastened upon me he nodded his head.

"You look as if you've been in a fight," he said.

"I have," said I, "with that God-blasted engine. I'm fed up with it."

"So I have gathered for some time past. You seem to work hard without getting anywhere, don't you? I'm going to sell the boat. I get very little use out of it, and it looks like a wood scow. I think you had better go back to the office. I promised you that."

"I am very sorry I ever let you bother with me, sir," I had grace to reply. "If I said I had tried to do my best, you'd laugh at me. I'll be glad to go back to the office, thanks." -

The boss was as good as his word, whatever the ultimate result. I was given a job in the accountant's office, taking care of the filing system, wages seventy-five dollars a month. Mr N. sent for me on the day I commenced, paid up what he owed me personally, and remarked: "Now that's out of my system. We have a theory here that the minimum wage on which a married man can live decently is nine hundred dollars a year. I hope you'll find the new work more to your liking."



On the way back to my department I tried to calculate what nine hundred a year meant per month. It sounded like a lot of money. It worked out at just what I was to get—seventy-five dollars a month. If that was the minimum, I might confidently look forward to the time when I would be earning a comfortable salary. I went into my new work with enthusiasm.

I had secured part of a little house on Staten Island, at Four Corners, for which I paid fifteen dollars a month rent. That meant that my daily car and ferry fares amounted to twenty cents; but I saved as much as that on the rent, for nowhere could I hear of the poorest apartments in New York or Brooklyn at less than twenty dollars monthly. The house was a miserable little wooden shack, far from anywhere, but fields lay behind it, and woods, and brooks; the small school near by had not the terrible hodgepodge of all nations to be found in the big city schools, and soon the elder girl at least would have to go to school.

Our home was dingy enough to please even my wife. She was an enigma to me. I can think of no better way to describe her than to say that poverty to her was not only no crime, but something to be proud of; that servants were inferior beings, unless they belonged to her immediate family.

The elder girl went to school. She came home in high glee at the end of a week, and began to teach her sister. The children had to salute the American flag each morning. They were taught a doggerel catch: "Red, white, and blue, the Stars over you!" The end of the week coincided with the end of a term, or period. Our budding scholar brought home her first American college yell: "Ching-a-ling, ching-a-ling, who are we? Graduates from the first year. Wee! Wee! Wee!"

Of course she was not a graduate, even from the first year; but the tiny tots who were had screamed that proud boast, and my girls were soon marching around the little wooden hut yelling it too.

My debt to Mrs C. had been paid off. I intended to pay Mr N. something every month as well; but whatever seventy-five dollars a month sounds like, it allows little for coming up, and we soon found that it took every cent to meet our living

expenses. That first winter at school my girl had no coat other than my uniform jacket cut down, and New York winters are cruel. There was coal to buy, and winter bedding. We burnt oil lamps, and heated the place with the kitchen range and a big-bellied stove in the middle of the living-room. Bedroom heat was non-existent, until we almost froze, when there was an oil heater to buy. I soon discovered the humour in Mr N.'s little joke about the minimum wage; I decided that he must wait for his money until I was lifted off the minimum. Had I never learnt that he paid me much less than all other men in my position were getting, I must have gone on paying him even though we lacked blankets or meat; but as things were, I counted what he had deducted, added to that what he had saved, and reckoned that I owed him less than half what he had advanced me. That reckoning was not right, I know; I still owe him something, and shall pay him if I ever have in hand more money than will suffice to pay my due debts. His debt is due, I'm not denying, but I cannot persuade myself that he needs the money more than I do, nor do I forget that what he did was primarily for his own interest and against my judgment.

Home life was less irritating because I was away all day. In the evenings I spent an hour with the girls before they went to bed, and for a while tried to find congenial companionship with my wife. She had no conversation, no mind. I remember Mrs C. called to see her, curious, I suppose, to see what sort of wife I had. Those two women sat opposite each other for an hour, conversation languishing; after a deadly silence, my wife made her first remark since greeting her visitor: "Do you like toas'? I could live on toas'." With scarcely a pause: "Do you like roas' pork? I do think roas' pork makes the most loveliest dinner."

When Mrs C. left she glanced at me in a curious manner. As soon as the door closed behind her, my wife said with emphasis:

"I don't like that woman. She looks at you as if there's something between you. I bet there is, too."

"Only gratitude on my part," I said shortly.

"Gratitude between a man and a woman? Think I'm a fool?"

In midwinter I received a letter which had a tremendous influence on my future. It was an invitation to help form an Adventurers' Club, and the writer hinted that he had heard about my sea career from a man who had met Red Saunders. There was to be a dinner, at Mouquin's on Sixth Avenue, price two dollars a plate, and the organizers wanted me to attend. The letter went on to name some of the other invitees, and my eyes popped wide. If I could get into a mob like that, who knew but that something better than wangling a battery of files for seventy-five dollars a month might turn up? Chiefly, however, was the burning longing within me to get away from home for one evening, to hear other men talk my own language, perhaps to forget for a few hours the burden of dissatisfaction which oppressed me. I had two dollars saved up for new shoes. I simply told my wife that I would be late on Saturday night, and sent an acceptance to the invitation. I'm sure my wife suspected that I was going to see that other woman.

It was a notable gathering of woolly vagabonds from all over the earth. Fritz Duquesne was there, nephew of Joubert, and later German spy; Emmett Wells, stage-driver of the real old West; there were aviators—and this was in 1912, when aviation meant something; Talbot Mundy, wanderer much like myself, who later wrote delectable tales of India; Colonel Church, who at that time was about as well known for a firebrand in Mexico and Bolivia as is *chili con carne*; Fred Chase, a real sourdough of the Alaska gold-rush. There were others, of course, but these will serve to indicate the character of the gathering. It was lucky they made the cost of the dinner only two dollars, for many besides myself paid down their last dime to get it. There was a newspaper man, Karl Kitchen, who wrote us into a piece for the *World*; Arthur Hoffman, a magazine editor, invited out of courtesy (and—who knows?—perhaps in hope).

With the object of getting the meeting round to the subject of a club, each prospective member was asked to relate some personal experience. When sending out invitations to prospective members, as apart from guests, men were invited only when some pretty convincing evidence had been secured that they

had "been somewhere and done something." It was likely, therefore, that the gathering might hear some good yarns. Unfortunately, doers are rarely tellers. Quite the most colourful tales were told by guests, and most of them were pretty gaudy. The adventurers themselves were mostly wordless men. My own little offering was stammered forth in what I felt sure was inarticulate babble. Yet after it was all over, and the club had been formed on a basis of no dues, no rules, no dress-clothes, and a maximum dinner charge of two dollars, dinners to be held once a month, some of the monied fellows bought liquor for the busted ones and tongues were loosened. Arthur Hoffman buttonholed me.

"Cap, write that yarn for me, will you?"

"Write?" I echoed. "Man, I can't write. I can hardly talk."

"I know you're not much of a talker, but that's a good yarn. Put it down on paper, and let me see it. I want plenty of that sort of stuff for the magazine."

I started home that night, or rather at three in the morning, in a daze which was not all due to liquor. I missed the last car and walked knee-deep in snow four miles, taking hours over it, arriving home at late dawn. It was Sunday, and I might have slept, but I did not. I never went to bed, but sat up thinking, until the children got up for breakfast. I believe their mother was convinced I had spent the night with a woman. When I told her about the editor she laughed.

"You write stories? Then you *would* have a fat head! But don't you fool yerself. Far better put yer mind to yer work and get us out of this dump."

Yes, it was already a dump to her. I had given up trying to fathom that woman's mind. I hurried through breakfast, got out an old log-book and pencil, and started to write that yarn. Hoffman had told me to write it as I would tell it, or as I would write a letter to him about it, so I began in that way. And as the thing grew, it flowed easily. I had only to live the thing over again to make it seem real. It was the yarn of Red Saunders and me at the Crozets and on St Paul, which has been related elsewhere in this record. I worked far into the night

and finished it. When I went to the office in the morning I took a big envelope from the store-room and mailed it. Then I tried to forget it. Try as I would I could not drive from my mind the tremendous hope that sprang to life. I had little time for reading fiction, nor could I afford much of it; but I did envy the men whose names filled those contents pages, and visualized them as glorious freelances, earning good money, able to live where and as they willed, their children enjoying everything that I longed to give to mine.

A week passed. Nothing. Two weeks. I gave it up. The woman was sarcastic. Then came a letter from Hoffman, in a square buff envelope—not a long manuscript envelope. I tore it open with shaking fingers.

“Come in and see me,” wrote Hoffman. “The story is fine. I want it. But you’ll have to have it typed for the printers, and there are one or two little things you could change to advantage. Call me up when you’re coming.”

I called him right away. I asked for extra time off at noon, and found the editorial office. My first encounter with a live editor in his den was a shaky experience—until I saw the editor. Then I found that he was as human now as when I met him over a rather damp dinner-table. He took a lot of pains over me. We spent an hour going over the manuscript, and when I left him I was utterly confident in my ability to satisfy him. I was too busy that afternoon, catching up on my work which had slipped behind during that extra hour, to do anything with my story; but when I went home that evening I felt warmer round the heart than I had felt for years. I’m sure the little girls thought I had won a prize, so enthusiastic were my hug and greeting. When I had eaten my supper, and produced my manuscript, the woman laughed over her dishes. That didn’t bother me in the least. I worked until midnight, making the suggested changes, and casually told my wife that the story was accepted.

She went to bed in flabbergasted silence.

I went to bed long afterwards, and had my sleep ruined by the sudden thought of that typewriting to be done!

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE WEATHER BREAKS

TYPEWRITING! I had seen typewriters in the office; there were a hundred of them; and to my ignorant mind the ladies who handled them were mechanical experts in the highest degree. To touch a machine would have given me cold sweat. How, then, was I to get that story typed? In the building were several public typists, and to one of them I took my precious manuscript. She was a fluffy blonde, a millionaire's daughter at least, and while she read the pencilled scrawl she chewed gum and scratched her head with a pencil.

"All right, whenja want it? It'll be fi' dollars."

Five dollars! I didn't believe that Kipling got five dollars for a short story. I reached for the manuscript.

"Thanks," I murmured, "I only wanted to inquire."

"Mind the squirrels don't getcha," said the princess.

My hopes were dashed. I could never afford to spend five dollars out of a week's wages to get that story typed. Had there been the least sympathy at home, perhaps we could have managed it, but most decidedly there was not. I said nothing about it, but tried to think it out while seeming entirely at ease. Hoffman had given me a copy of his magazine to read, so that I might get an idea for future work. I saw nothing of the stuff I read; the magazine might as well have been a book of tailor's samples. I turned the pages without a single title impressing itself on my mind; and at the end of the magazine the advertising pages were just about as interesting—until a picture of a typewriter stabbed me in the eye.

Typewriters holding my interest to the exclusion of all else, I read that advertisement. The Typewriter Distributing Syndicate, of Chicago, offered to ship on approval to anybody presenting suitable references a machine which according to them was the top note in modern efficiency. Of course it was a

rebuilt article they offered, but to me it was the vision splendid. My problem was solved. I had tackled harder jobs than learning to use a machine of which I was frightened. My landlord was a parson, so he would doubtless be acceptable as a reference, though Lord knows why. I have known parsons—and parsons. I wouldn't accept one as a reference unless he had something besides a collar buttoned behind. Down went his name, however. By this time I was determined to have that machine. Without asking permission, I gave as a second reference the great firm I worked for, and off went the order.

In a week the machine came. I think even my wife was impressed. Ten days was the trial period allowed, so I sat up all night when I had unpacked it, battling with the iron monster. It was bewildering. I touched it tenderly. Then I recalled the way the girls used their machines, contemptuously, nonchalantly. My fingers began to lose their tenderness. Once I touched a key and the whole carriage went crashing to the end of the rails, bringing up with a whang and a ringing of bells. That finished me. I went to bed. Next day I asked one of the lads in the office to show me something about typing, and the way that callow youth mishandled an expensive machine made me feel ashamed of myself. When next I sat down to the old Oliver it was with a sense of equality at least.

At the end of a week I had become so proficient that I wrote acknowledging receipt of the splendid machine. I said that owing to circumstances over which I had no control I had not been able to give the machine a proper test. Could I have an extension of the approval period for a few days? Whatever the answer might be, I believed that I could get most of the work done before it came. When I received the reply that the period could not be extended, I had almost finished my manuscript; so I went on with it until I wrote *Finis*. Then I took the story in to Hoffman. He read it at once. He already knew all about it, and only needed to make sure that I had properly incorporated the changes he wanted.

"Fine!" he said. "I'll give you sixty-five dollars for it. Come down to the cashier and I'll get the cheque." I followed

him downstairs in a foggy daze. I held the slip of paper as if it were a reprieve from death.

"Let me see something else soon," he said, showing me out.

Sixty-five dollars! I found waiting for me at home a peremptory demand for a cheque or immediate return of the typewriter. I wrote a dignified note, enclosing a money order for thirty-five dollars in full payment, and became at once a successful author and owner of property.

With that first cheque earned in literary endeavour the girls were clothed, and with what was left I went to see a doctor about my arm. I ought to have seen an oculist, but the arm was getting very disquieting. When the bandage was off I could see the bone, and at times it ached terribly. The doctor at once said that I must go into hospital.

"If you don't have that off now, at the elbow, in a few months it'll have to come off at the shoulder—if it doesn't kill you," he said. I paid him his five dollars fee, and went home. I bought a big roll of wide adhesive tape and a bottle of Creso, and carried on. If that arm must come off, I'd as soon it came off at the shoulder as at the elbow. To me it made no difference.

We discussed at home what we should do if my writing continued to make money. It seemed to be unanimous that we ought to return to England. We were making no friends in America. Those folks who seemed to me worth cultivating were not approved by my wife. The people she would have welcomed I would not have at any price as long as my girls were at an impressionable age. We decided on England. I sold two more stories to the same magazine, and handed in my resignation at the office. Wage increases had been given, but not to me. Mr Storm, my immediate chief, had told me that my work was giving complete satisfaction, in fact he had never had it done so well; but he shook his head when I asked about more money. He did not say outright, but suggested plainly, that there was no prospect for me, though I could keep the job I had as long as I continued to give satisfaction. I saw Mr N. and told him I was leaving. He reminded me that I had made no attempt to pay off my debt to him, and I retorted that



he had told me that the salary I received was the absolute minimum on which a married man could exist, and that surely meant that I had no money to spare. We parted on that note, and I went home a free man.

About this time my father's widow left England to be married, and my moiety of the inheritance arrived in the form of a bank draft for sixty pounds. That was the bare proportion of the sum realized by the sale of the house for £240. I was too glad to get it to worry about whatever else ought to have been forthcoming. I sent £5 to my brother, and £5 to Dick Money, and felt easier for that. Putting all the rest together with the cash in hand from stories sold, I announced to the family that they could go home at once, and I would remain to sell up the furniture and rattle off a few more stories, rejoining them as soon as they had settled.

"I can keep in touch with editors better that way, at least until I have a bit more money put by," I said.

They sailed in the *St Paul*, and I sold up the home after they had gone, then took a room in New York and settled down to write in earnest. The rent was twelve dollars a month, the room just big enough to hold my desk, a chair, and a cot. My books were kept under the cot except when I was working, when they lay on it, and I could reach them from my chair without getting up. For capital I had the money realized by selling the furniture, which wasn't much. But ahead I could see fine weather, a nice home for my daughters, and the ability to earn a living wherever I chose to dwell. Already my ambition began to raise a groggy head again.

I wrote solely for Hoffman in those early days. He was not only the most kindly fellow personally, but the only editor I knew. He liked my stuff, too, and had bought my first efforts at what seemed to me to be fabulous prices. The first tale I sent to him after settling in my diggings was kept for a month, then he sent for me. He pointed out faults. I took the story home and rewrote it. Still it didn't please him, and after another interview I rewrote it again. In all, I wrote that tale four times, each time incorporating in the new version his suggestions. In the end he turned it down cold. That was my

first eye-opener. My course had seemed so straight, my seas so smooth. I put the tale aside and wrote another. He sent that back quickly, and my old seaman's nose smelled breakers. One of the Adventurers' Club members who had existed for a year or two on his writings told me of other editors. I sent both those rejected manuscripts out again. Then began my experience with editors as a class.

Hoffman was the friendliest fellow in the world; he would go to all sorts of trouble to point out faults, but in the end he had no scruples whatever in turning down something which I had sweated over unendingly at his suggestion; yet, later on, Arthur Hoffman bought a short story of mine for several hundred dollars, and weeks later sent me a further cheque for a hundred dollars saying that he had discovered a mistake in his first estimate of length. Hoffman was like that—straight as a deck seam.

I wrote feverishly, knowing no hours, sparing of meals. Often I bought a bagful of rolls and ate them in my room, never going out for days except to buy more rolls from the little Hungarian restaurant in the basement. The stories all came back; but now I was feeling the thrill of the fight, and wouldn't have taken a job at any salary. Pride may have had something to do with that decision. Then the War broke out. That gave me to think still harder. There was little I could do, what with my eyes and my right forearm, which was a ghastly limb by this time. I visited the Consulate, and made inquiries. There was nothing I could do. The War was not yet taken very seriously outside of the homeland. I went back to my desk. After a few months of utter failure a fellow-member of the Adventurers' Club dropped in on me and we swapped experiences in the writing game. He had recently come to New York from India, Burma, and the Shan States. He too had ambitions to become an author; though in his case I could not see why, because he was a big-game expert, had collected wild beasts and big snakes for Jamrach, and had all kinds of ability in other directions. A writer he would be, however, and he found the going rough. He suggested that I quit my tiny room and share his flat in the most seething section of the

Bronx. He knew my family affairs; I had taken him over to Four Corners once, and the girls loved him, but my wife disliked his public-school way of speaking and made her dislike quite clear. He never ventured again; but I think he felt a bit sorry for me and was rather glad I had sent the family home.

"It won't cost any more for rent, light, or heat if you come, and I do all my own cooking," he said. "We can help each other a lot."

I went. I sold my cot to pay for moving the desk and chair, and took the subway to 148th Street.

I had never been inside the place before. When I rang the bell, Mac called "Enter," and I opened the door upon a narrow dark passage at the end of which was a vague red glow. My eyes being as they were, I did not for some time venture beyond the passage, but stood blinking in the dull glow, trying to see where to step. Gradually I made out a room hung with Oriental fabrics, decorated with *kukris*, shields, tapestry, and idols. Underfoot lay a sumptuous rug of a queer pattern. I was astounded, for I expected to find Mac living pretty much as I had lived, in barren poverty, not splendour.

"Come ahead," Mac called again. "It's a bit dark, I expect, entering from outside."

I stepped gingerly forward, staring at that carpet. The pattern was moving. Of course, my eyes! I stepped again, and that damned pattern resolved itself into a twelve-foot python, which slithered across the room and disappeared under a couch. I swore, backed, and Mac chuckled.

"I had forgotten about Billy. He's harmless. Sit, smoke. What news goes forth in Gath?"

Men who have caught them may find snakes pleasant company, but though I managed to live with Billy until we had to get rid of him, I never felt like putting my bare foot to the floor in the morning until Mac assured me that the brute was on his own bed.

We discussed our plans. Mac showed me the cash bowl, and explained that he always put in it whatever cash was left after he had paid up his debts on selling a story. He had recently sold one, so there was money in the bowl.

"We've got two weeks before more rent comes due, instalments on furniture, and so forth. It's my own typewriter. Yours is paid for? Good. Then we can live like lords. I'll make a big pot of curry to-night that'll last us three days, and with some *Pumpernickel* and tea that's about all we'll need. We can get down to work." Thus Mac, the decent one, and thus we settled. Things did not look so black after all. Gordon Macreagh was a fit successor to dear old Dick Money.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### WITH KNOBS ON IT

WE were not very good writers. I have always maintained that Mac could have been among the top flight; he had education plus experience, which is fifty per cent. more than most authors have; but he persisted in doing wild adventure fiction, and found it difficult. His two qualifications refused to pull together. Later on, when he did a travel-book, he produced the best thing of its kind that ever saw print. In fiction we each found the same snag; our first accepted stories had happened to be actual personal adventures which contained in themselves all the desired elements; when we had exhausted the few—there are very few such in any man's life—we still wrote as before and wondered why our tales failed to satisfy even a friendly editor. In those months we were to know poverty with knobs on.

When the first wounded Canadians returned from France, a party of them toured the States recruiting British subjects. Mac had decided to become an American citizen; he had a mild grouch against England, having fallen foul of petty snotty officialdom in the East, I think; he was entirely sincere in his refusal to see any business of his in England's war. I was not in the least eager to become Americanized. I liked tremendously most Americans I had met, found them generous, friendly, and engagingly honest; but, as a nation, I disliked the United States intensely, its freedom seemed shoddy, its politics rotten, and its patriotism mostly loud brag. Give them a slogan, and a button or little flag for their coat lapel, and the nation can be led by its collective nose to any height of absurdity—or heroic achievement. Decidedly I wanted to do my bit, so I went down to the Canadian recruiting station and offered myself. To my amazement my dud eyes were passed; they let me take the test with glasses. I had been forced

to get glasses for reading and writing. My teeth, which were very completely bad, also failed to discourage them. They jibbed at my arm, though I tried to avoid taking off the bandage and told them it was only a football bruise. The doctor who examined me called others when he unwrapped it, and three clear-eyed Canadians regarded me with friendly grins.

"Over age, too, aren't you? Sorry. Got to hand it to you for trying, anyway. Give him a card, sergeant."

I took home my rejection card. Mac read it, and nodded.

"That ought to satisfy you," he said. "Now we can get down to work again. They'll win the war without you, don't worry."

Among Mac's acquaintances was a genial Yorkshireman who had a small sloop yacht. On one or two Saturdays we went sailing, and I was able to make some return for the privilege. W. was not a sailor in any degree; he owned a smart little vessel, bought every book on seamanship and navigation, had a sextant, a barometer, and patent log; but he was scared of them all, he would not leave his moorings without some expert in charge. He was a bit particular about his friends, so spent many a week-end at his anchorage before Mac took me down to see him. Mac was no sailor either. His estimate of a vessel was made on a basis of the cabin upholstery, and what sort of picture a pretty girl might make at the wheel. Soon the time came when we could not afford the trifling fares to Gravesend Bay, and our sailing perforce ceased.

When things were looking pretty blue, Mac completed a story and set out to walk it down to the editor, saving the subway fare. It was four miles, through hot streets, crowds, and traffic. We had been eating very economically, and some bills were due. I locked the doors and worked. In the afternoon Mac returned with a bang. He was dusty, and breathless.

"Laddie, put on your bonnet," he said intensely. "Hurry up. I'll stand you a feed."

As we almost ran down-town again, I wondering why we did not ride since he must have struck wealth, he kept chuckling, and by fragments I heard the news.

"I've heard of an automat where the meat-pie cubby-hole doesn't lock properly."

Well down-town on Sixth Avenue it was. The automat is a clever invention for feeding people in a hurry without any human service. Near the door the cashier sits in a box, handing out change. All round the walls are metal boxes, like *poste restante* boxes, and above each is a board setting out prices for each item of food. One puts a nickel or dime in a slot, a door opens, and there's the dish, to be taken out and eaten at a table near by. There are boxes containing cutlery beneath the food cupboards. The only human being in evidence besides the cashier and customers is the very busy lad who gathers up the soiled crockery. Mac needed no change. He had just one dime; the stout fellow had walked all that weary journey instead of riding home in order that I might eat. He put in his dime, the meat-pie door opened, and he snatched his pie.

"Go on! It's not locked!" he whispered.

Nervously I tried it. It opened. I got my pie, and we ate, neither feeling quite at ease until we saw the crockery boy in passing slam the pie door shut and knock on it. It fastened then, and another dime must be spent to open it again; but we were filled. We found the long walk back almost pleasant. It was the first real meal we had eaten for a week. Here I may say that when we had money later on Mac went to that shop and gently laid before the girl two dimes, explaining that she had on an earlier occasion given too much change. She looked at him as if suspicious that he had escaped from a looney house.

Billy, the python, needed two rabbits every week. We could not buy food for ourselves. For a few days Mac and I foraged for cats by night, but cats in the Bronx soon learn almost to fly, and after Billy had attempted and refused one feline meal, Mac sighed. An instalment was overdue on his furniture; he could not yet make up his mind to sell the few treasures from his walls; sorrowfully we crammed Billy into a trunk, and together we carried him down-town to a pet-shop on Third Avenue. The market price, selling, was a dollar a foot for big snakes. We managed to get fifty cents a foot for Billy, six dollars. When we returned home, the instalment man was waiting on the mat. It was a fair cop. We shut the door after satisfying him and counted our change. Poor Billy had been-

sacrificed to little advantage. There remained fifteen cents. With that I visited a basement sale at a big store near by and bought fifteen cents' worth of hard beans, slightly soiled. We again locked our door, pulled down the blinds, and hoped fervently that Mac's story would speedily sell. We boiled the beans. They swelled into a staggering mass of grub; and for a week we ate nothing else. We had salt, but no bread; tea, but no sugar. Meanwhile we slogged our typewriters in desperation. At the end of the week our stomachs rebelled. Mac swung around on his chair.

"They pay five bucks for prelims," he remarked.

"Pay what for which?" I returned, blankly.

"At the Fairlight Fight Club. We might get put on for a four-rounder. But there's that arm of yours. It's a pity."

"Never mind the arm. What's the idea?"

"Five dollars is a lot of money. Maybe we could fake a scrap," said Mac, deep in thought.

Five dollars was indeed a lot of money. Four rounds was not a long job—if it could be done. We talked about it a while, then slipped out and went by different routes to the neighbouring Athletic Club where gory fights were put on weekly. When I entered the match-maker's office, Mac was already there, looking tough, spitting freely to keep up the atmosphere. I offered my services. The match-maker glanced at me. I looked lean enough; preliminary boxers are not expected to look prosperous or to present unimpeachable credentials. They are expected to fight, not box.

"Fight him?" grunted the man, nodding at Mac.

"Anybody," I answered, emulating Mac and spitting contemptuously. The place looked as if a good many aspiring scrappers had spat contemptuously.

"All right. Eight-thoity sharp. Four rounds. Fi' dollars fer th' bout. Split it as youse like. If youse don't fight youse git trun out, see?"

In our rooms we shifted the furniture and boxed a bit, Mac being very careful of my arm. Then we put a good stout bandage on my wound, and sewed it securely. We kidded ourselves that we could put up a fine fake scrap; and at the



appointed time we appeared in the ring for the opener. We boxed cleverly, making a lot of noise with half-clenched gloves, snarling at each other, doing well. The bout was stopped.

"Get in there an' fight, youse guys. If I gotta speak to youse again I'll trun youse out, see? Go to it," said the referee.

We touched gloves, and I saw a gleam of sorrow in Mac's blue eye. We fought. Make no mistake about that. Blood the fans wanted, howled for, and got. My arm suffered. It could not be helped. Whenever he could do so without jeopardizing the fight Mac let me hit him with a right rather than stop it at the cost of a blow on my arm. But there could be no real letting up. It was a fight in truth; Mac gave me the most unmerciful hiding I ever got from a man. We finished all out, and the fans screamed and stamped. We had pleased them, and Mac collected the five dollars. We hurried out to a cheap restaurant and ordered two big steaks. Mac had a purple eye, and my mouth was not where it ought to be; but that steak was good. As Mac wiped up the last speck of gravy with a bit of bread, he remarked thoughtfully:

"I ought to have told you that I was once middle-weight champion of Upper Burma. We'd have got no steak if I hadn't walloped you. If it wasn't for that arm of yours we might get another five-spot next week. They liked us."

Two days later a cheque came for Mac's story—seventy-five dollars. It relieved the situation, and I was glad, for my arm had not been improved by that four-rounder. My own stories continued to come back. Latterly there had been no friendly letter with them, but a printed slip. When autumn was well advanced we had a visit from the owner of the little sloop, and he seemed surprised when we told him why we had not been sailing with him of late. He made a shy sort of suggestion that he might get one of us the job of caretaker for his Yacht Club during the winter.

"The club's open for members who want to play with their boats in the off season," he said. "There's nothing to do, except at week-ends, there's a little shack to live in, and we supply coal and light. Not much money in it, thirty a month I think. Suppose that doesn't interest either of you?"

Mac and I exchanged glances. No rent? Coal and light found? Winter coming on?

"Would you come if I took it?" I asked. "Surest thing you know," said Mac. "There's money for moving, too, if we can move soon."

So we went to Gravesend Bay, and again I made the acquaintance of spittoons and drunks. Between week-ends we wrote, and the members no doubt thought us queer fish. They had never had literary spittoon-cleaners before. On Saturdays and Sundays I tended bar, serving whisky and beer, supplying cards, swabbing tables. The work done by members who wanted to play with their boats during the winter consisted in emptying demijohns of rye and playing poker. My Monday morning job was beastly; but there were thirty dollars a month in it, and that fed us. One stormy Sunday a small yacht that had been left out overlong was sunk. Mac and I worked all night in the snow and sleet, up to our necks in icy water, and raised her. When the owner came down, having been 'phoned about it, he looked amazed to find his boat safely shored up on the beach. He offered Mac a tip, and of course Mac refused it. He offered it to me, and I too refused it. I was taking wages for my work and felt that I ought to be at least as proud as Mac. That sweet yachtsman, half drunk then, asked if he might use our cooking-stove for a party he expected that evening, and we left him in the kitchen while we went on with our literary endeavours. The man was in the kitchen all afternoon, after he had been out and returned; and at five o'clock he put his head into our room and told us that he had finished with the stove. Would we clear up everything he had left? I grunted something, and he departed. Mac went in to put on the kettle for tea, and I heard him shout. I hurried in, expecting to find some ungodly mess for me to clean up; and on the table sat a steaming roast chicken, a loaf of bread, a dish of potatoes, and a pie. A pot of coffee bubbled on the stove.

Just another instance of the way warm-hearted Americans contrive to get around silly Britishers who are too proud to take a tip.

Mac continued to sell a story now and then, and invariably

he insisted upon my sending home the equivalent of my wages. On an average I sent home fully thirty dollars a month, which was equal to about thirty shillings a week, so I had few doubts about my little family's ability to carry on. Mac's argument was that he owed that for his quarters and fuel and light; though since he helped me with the unpleasant work he was romancing a bit.

In late winter I got a piece of encouragement. Bob Davis, editor-in-chief of the Munsey publications, wrote me a personal letter. He said I had been sending stuff in to him for almost a year, and all of it was fine material, but I missed something in the use of it. He would like to see me.

I wasted no time in presenting myself to the terrible Bob Davis in the Flatiron Building. I had heard writers discussing Davis. Some called him hard names, some praised him. Since those days I have come to my own conclusions. If Bob Davis ever treated a writer badly, it was only after that writer had tried to pull a whizzer on Bob. In the whole world of letters there is no man who has done more to help new writers; no man whose keen brain has been more at the disposal of struggling temporary failures. Bob Davis has rightly earned the name of America's greatest fiction editor. Many British authors owe much to him. Arnold Bennett did. Conrad did. *Victory* would never have been more than a scrappy piece of fine writing but for Davis. I entered his office rather in trepidation, and saw a pair of the keenest eyes taking in every detail of myself as I advanced to take his proffered hand. The moment I felt his grip I knew that here was a man who expected to deal with men, and would have no use for half-men.

"Sit down, Cap," he said. I should mention that my first work had been published under my full name. Because of my connection with the Adventurers' Club I was usually called "Captain." The first thing Bob Davis said was: "If I were you, I'd write under a pen-name—no initials or Christian names—Captain Marryatt style. You do fine sea stuff, and there's a wide-open market for it." I filed that suggestion, and made use of it ever after. He went on to point out that my stuff lacked all form; that fiction was not just real-life experiences, but

those experiences built up into a fabric. He told me, as later he told Conrad, that a lot of splendid scenes and incidents without plot were like a lot of pearls of varying sizes, ungraded and unstrung.

"If you see a heap of marble, cedar, stained glass—priceless things of their kind—they don't present to you much of an idea of splendour, do they? But let a cunning artisan get to work on them, build them into a palace, and——" His eyes twinkled. "Get me?"

He took from a drawer my last story.

"This is the finest bit of sea stuff I have ever read," he said. "But it's like the heap of stuff I just mentioned. Now you want to start here——" He went on and as he spoke I saw my poor work assume a form and a fabric which made it a story. "Take it home, Cap. Do it over, and let me see it again. Make it good and salt and windy. There's no reason why you shouldn't find your way regularly to our cashier's office."

For two weeks I wrote like one possessed of new hope. I passed Davis' advice on to Mac, and he went to work on some old rejected stuff thoughtfully. If ever I glanced towards him I could see his round head nodding as he changed the old for the new. But my own work fascinated me. I saw it grow into a story. The original had been a short tale of five or six thousand words; the new became a novelette of many thousands more, and even I, who wrote it, could enjoy reading over my day's work. When it was finished I carried it to Davis. He was a busy editor; I thought he seemed scarcely as cordial as before; but his grip was as hard, his eyes as kindly, and he promised to give me a decision in a week or so. The outer office was full of men waiting to see him, so undoubtedly I was mistaken about his cordiality.

In a week's time I knew. A cheque came. Three hundred dollars! Mac stared at it as he might stare at a genie rising from a beer-bottle. I let him gloat while I read the letter that came with the cheque. It was better than the cheque—almost. It definitely encouraged me to go on, for Bob Davis was asking for more, and from all I had heard about him he never said what he didn't mean, good or bad.

"You won't have to worry any more. I'm glad," said Mac.

With that cheque I sent for my family again, left the club, and went back to Staten Island to find a little house. Mac had taken out his first naturalization papers, and had long thought of going in for aviation. He joined a volunteer outfit, and went to Florida. I settled upon a half-house in a nicer part of the island, and while waiting for my family went on writing. I had decided that if I was to make the most of my new opportunities I must forget all about England for a while and get down to hard work until I was firmly established. I sold another story the week my little family arrived. Funds were assured. They had first booked by the *Lusitania*, but she was sunk on her way over, so they had to wait for another ship. They had seen Oxford's famous Schools used as a hospital, had seen German prisoners brought in, and had traversed the submarine zone by sea. My little girls were having experiences early in life.

They had grown splendidly, and soon started school again. It was difficult for them at first, because they had attended school in Oxford, and had to unlearn all they had learnt. They were big enough now to resent childishly having to salute the American flag, since they had known the love of their own; but school was good for them, and since I was home all day now, and they were out for the greater part, I had hopes of definitely eradicating from their minds the silly vulgarisms which they had contrived to learn again during their absence. That was not easy. The woman had not changed a bit, would never change now. I have a vivid recollection of her one day when I had asked her please to impress upon the girls that while I was at work in my own room they must not disturb me.

Capering about the floor, slapping her rump, she cried:

"I'm a writer! I'm a writer! I mustn't be disturbed! Come on, my darlings, we'll go out. Yer Daddy mustn't be disturbed. He's a writer now."

While Mac and I had been together we had met a few writing folk. Venette Herron had a flat on Lower Fifth Avenue, and on Fridays she had a gathering of authors—mostly poor. Achmed Abdullah went to them. He was poor

then, for whenever he sold a story he took out a bit more life insurance in his wife's behalf. There were poets, too; and actors. We all took in a little contribution to the evening's refreshment, according to our means. On one occasion there were seven bags of potato salad and a bottle of whisky. It was all very amusing. Venette Herron stayed for a few weeks in lodgings near the house I had taken; one day she asked me to bring from town some small article she needed, and naturally I did so. My wife was watching for me, and saw me leaving Mrs Herron's place. She immediately gathered the two girls to her, gripped one in each hand, and came tramping along to meet me, her face black as hell, and her lip stuck out, screaming to the girls to see what their Daddy was doing, playing about with other women.

A day or so later Venette Herron called on her. My wife got a pail of water, knelt down, and started to scrub the floor around her visitor's feet, muttering to herself about loose women.

Barometer stormy! Further outlook, damned unpleasant!

## CHAPTER XXXII

### GETTING ON

How I envy those famous authors who must have solitude and an unharassed mind in order to write! I wonder how far most of them would have got in my circumstances. But then I am not, nor do I ever expect to be, a famous author. To be a successful writer will be sufficient.

Soon we were able to move again, nearer to the sea. We took a nice house all to ourselves, set in a broad garden with lawns and fruit-trees and flowers at Great Kills, Staten Island. Poor W. was dead, and his widow asked me to help her about his boat. The United States Navy had taken over the yard in which it lay, and the boat had been shifted over to another yard. There were charges against it totalling two hundred and twenty-four dollars, and unless they were paid the widow was threatened with the loss of the boat. Funds were not very plentiful with me at the time, but I paid the bills, and offered to buy the boat if I could do it by instalments. Mrs W. was very glad of the offer, and agreed that I should pay five hundred altogether, including the amount of bills I paid. I was conducting for a magazine a personal information department, for which I received fifty cents for each letter written. It amounted to about twenty dollars a month, and I arranged for the cheque to be paid directly to Mrs W. I mention this here because I afterwards heard that a silly fellow in New York had spread the yarn that I robbed the widow of her yacht. The items paid varied from seven to fifty dollars, and the full sum agreed upon was duly paid. It would have been impossible for me to buy a vessel in any other way; had I not come down with the money for those bills the vessel must have been seized for debt. My part of the contract was carried out to the letter.

However, I brought the boat across to Great Kills harbour

and anchored her there to save yard bills. We sailed sometimes, and the girls were having much better times. We also acquired a pedigree Airedale, and things were looking up.

My stories sold readily now. I was not yet in the big-money class, but there was rarely a month when my work did not appear in one or two magazines. Now I was able to help others a bit. A Dr Stokes, of Washington, conducted a service for friendless convicts, securing correspondents for prisoners who had no letter-writers or people to whom to write. I joined up, and drew a convict in Sing Sing, who was doing time for some race-track irregularity; and one in Leavenworth Prison, who was of the *élite* of crookdom, an internationally known rogue. I visited the man in Sing Sing, left him trifles of cash for cigarettes, and when he came out met him and tried to get work for him. That was hard. The only thing I could get was a job running an elevator at seven dollars a week. I knew that wouldn't keep a man honest—and so did my prisoner. He thanked me sincerely, and I lost sight of him. The other man was too far away to visit, but I kept writing to him, and in return received the most astounding letters. He was a man of culture, educated at Princeton, U.S.A., and Heidelberg. His letters were a joy. When he was released I met him in New York and took him to my home. Of course I dared not say who he was; but my girls idolized him. He taught them to play draughts, to sketch, to mix colours, and always told them a charming story before they went to bed.

I wanted him to try writing stories. He had a wealth of material, unique indeed. He had pulled off some of the greatest *coups* in criminal history. A short, stout little man, red-faced, bald, he was a perfect gentleman in my house. I gave him a corner in my study, let him use my typewriter, and got him to try his hand. When he had done a story I read it, saw the same little faults that had marred my own first work, and sat down to polish it up for him. Then I left him busy on another tale, while I went to New York to try to sell it. I got fifty dollars for it without any trouble, and a request for more. Late that night I hurried home, full of



hope for Sam Bachman. As I approached the house in the small hours I saw my study was still lit up. Fine! Sam was burning the midnight oil. He'd be overjoyed when I gave him that fifty dollars.

I crept up, careful of not waking the folks; opened the study door, and—there was Sam, bending over my stove, turning out dud half-dollars by the dozen. He looked up with a grin, then offered me a hot coin.

"Not bad, eh, Cap?" he grinned. I stared down at the mould, at a saucepan of molten metal, offering dumbly my fifty dollars. He stood up, shaking his head sadly. "It's no use," he said. "You'll never reclaim an old lag. I went along the beach and got some pewter cups out of a hotel closed for the season. It took me a week to earn that fifty bucks, Cap, and then you did most of the work. I've made more than fifty dollars since I came in this evening. It's hopeless. You've done the first decent thing I've had done for me in years, and I'm grateful. But if you don't mind, I'll pull my freight in the morning."

Sam left. A month or so later I had a letter from him. He was in Chicago, and wanted to get a job as night-clerk at a big hotel. Would I give him a reference? Reluctantly I had to decline. A night-clerk has too many opportunities.

When the United States entered the War, I found myself in demand. I had won some recognition as a writer of sea-stories; men recognized them as the work of a seaman. A gentleman whom I had met was anxious to learn navigation in order to have a chance at a commission in the newly forming Naval Reserve, and asked me to give him tuition in his office. From that grew a class, and soon I was given the board-room of the great Biltmore Hotel as a class-room and gathered a notable lot of men together there. Many wealthy Americans joined the Services. Some of them undoubtedly wanted only to do their bit. Others wanted to be sure of soft billets, and many joined with ulterior motives. There were the dollar-a-year men, who gave their services to their country at a dollar a year—and secured fat contracts from the Government. One man who came to my class was going to offer his

yacht to the Government, and meant to command it if possible—and he got the contract for most of the horseshoes used by the Army. But in general my pupils were earnest men. One, a prominent banker, joined the Navy as a flatfoot, and his wife brought him to and fetched him from my class in a limousine which cost more money than I had ever earned in a year of hard work.

Captain Adams came to examine my classes, and told me how good my work was. Soon I was offered a commission in the United States Navy to continue my teaching officially, if I would take out citizenship papers. That I did not mean to do if I could get into the mess in any way under my own flag. I tried again at the Consulate. No good. Through Bob Davis I was put in touch with Captain Guy Gaunt; and presently I heard that if I went to Bermuda there might be something I could do there. That gave me to think. I asked my family about it. New York winters were terrible. There was going to be a shortage of coal. We were not long in coming to a decision; but I was asked to carry on with my classes while the heavy recruiting was going on, and I did so. That kept me employed all the winter. My writing suffered, and I charged nothing in fees, asking only just enough to pay for books and material. When at last I was free, I had to get down to hard writing to recoup my losses, and with one thing and another the spring and summer came before I was able to think of Bermuda again. In May I got a cheque from Bob Davis for a thousand dollars, and a new story just completed was certain to bring as much more. I set to work on our plans. We decided to sell our furniture, keep only the piano (bought for the girls), my books, and desk. Then I went to arrange for passages, and discovered how difficult travel can be when a country is at war.

Passport troubles delayed us. Then we discussed the little yacht. Even my wife had grown attached to it. The girls wept at the thought of losing it. I had four hundred books by now; and inquiry regarding shipping them elicited the information that every one must be taken to the Custom House for censorship before taking them out of the country.

For passage to Bermuda there was only the disabled old cruiser *Charybdis*, which had been damaged in collision off Sandy Hook while on convoy duty. Aboard her there was no room for carrying a five-ton sloop. There was scarcely room for passengers. The only bathroom was the skipper's own; the passenger accommodation the roughest makeshift on the mess-decks. I wanted to take the dog, too, and there was no encouragement whatever in that direction.

At last I decided to sail the boat down, taking the dog and my books, and to send the family by the steamer with the piano and my study gear. I tried to get a man to sail with me. All suitable men were wanted in the Army or Navy and could get no passports. My decision once made, that could never stop me. I made up my mind to sail alone. The passage from New York to Bermuda had never been made single-handed before; the hurricane season was approaching; if I were to go it must be quickly. Finally the day arrived. Passages were booked, the furniture sold, and my wife and girls were to stay with neighbours until the *Charybdis* was ready. Then on August 13, 1918, off I sailed, my books stowed below, my Airedale barking in response to my daughters' waving. Because in many ways that was a noteworthy voyage, it is perhaps best to set it down as the log described it. My actual log was published in the *Bermuda Colonist* on my arrival, printed from the water-soaked pages themselves. It was afterwards published in *Adventure* of New York as a notable adventure; later still it was republished in the *Mid-Ocean* of Bermuda. Here then I reprint it. Copying it to-day, sitting in a fairly comfortable room, snug and dry, some of the wording seems a bit mushy; it was originally written out there in the middle of things, and obviously represented my feelings at that time. This must be its justification.

I received my code signal from the Navy Office on the afternoon of the thirteenth, with instruction to follow the coast to Cape Lookout, south of Hatteras, before making easting; to run without lights and to answer no whistle signals, on account of enemy submarine operations.

A seaman will readily understand why I could never for a moment consider obeying those orders. They were issued on the assumption that the vessel receiving them was manned with a crew able to keep alert look-out, and with hands to spare in an emergency. I had no crew and no hands except my own two. For the little vessel to run down the coast without lights, right along the coastwise steamer lanes, among countless vessels also running without lights, meant sheer suicide, and I refused to think of it. My course lay offshore, and the moment Sandy Hook was cleared the sloop's nose was aimed for as wide an offing as possible. So, while other troubles came in plenty, I was never, so far as I know, in danger of being run down. I also carried lights. The actual log follows:

*August 13, 1918.* Got under weigh at 8 P.M. Grounded on bar. Lay-to all night.

*August 14.* Under weigh again at 11 A.M., as soon as morning tide made sufficiently to cross the bar. Ran down to Prince's Bay and made number to the guardship.

2 P.M. Passed out Sandy Hook. Hot and very small breeze.

4 P.M. Ambrose Lightship bore east, one mile distant. Course south-east.

5 P.M. Black squall out of N.E. got me with some of new gear jammed. Split new jib and mainsail. Wind all around compass, then two hours flat calm. Shifted sails and ran under jib all night.

*August 15.* Loosed mainsail at dawn, but smart gale from north blew all forenoon. Tied up mainsail; made fair course under jib alone. Dog very sick. Log registered seventy-one miles at noon. Lat.  $39^{\circ} 38'$ ; long.  $73^{\circ} 06'$ .

*August 16.* Mostly calm to mid-day. Made three miles in six hours. Total distance from S.H. 120 miles.

*August 17.* Faint airs. Very hot. Barometer 30.26, rising. Passed mass of wreckage alive with sharks. Bodies among the wreckage; sharks are fighting and tearing furiously. Calm, with high swell at N.E. Distance from S.H. 166 miles. Lat.  $38^{\circ} 06'$  N.; long. (D.R.)<sup>1</sup>  $71^{\circ} 51'$  W.

*August 18.* Overcast, stormy sky. Dog appeared from beneath the upturned boat and had her first real meal on the voyage. Gale set in from N.E. and blew hard all day. Had

<sup>1</sup> Dead Reckoning—i.e., estimated; no observation.

intended taking my spells of sleep during daytime; have not succeeded in sleeping yet. Doze at the wheel sometimes. Opened box of candies my little girls put on board for me. Water has made them very gooey. Distance from S.H., 6 P.M., 297 miles. Barometer steady. Dog disgustedly put her generous meal back at my feet.

*August 19.* Breeze appeared to moderate in forenoon, but developed in afternoon to gale from N.E. Boat is straining badly in the high seas. Made 116 miles these twenty-four hours on S. by W. course. Cold and raining. Barometer not very reliable. Has rarely given correct warning. Lat.  $30^{\circ} 40'$ ; long.  $70^{\circ} 57' W.$  Both dead reckoning. No observation.

*August 20.* Moderated in A.M., but seas still lumpy. Sloop is leaking badly. Pump every four hours. Series of squalls; then gale settled down afresh at 5 P.M.

At 11 P.M. lost second jib and split second mainsail. Cut away raffle and bent only complete spare. Job took five hours. Log rotator continually fouled with weed. No observation.

*August 21.* Labouring heavily. Leak seems worse. It is on starboard side forward, apparently in chainplates. In violent pitching of the sloop the sixty-gallon water-tank got stove in. Every drop of water has gone into the bilges. Have only the two emergency bottles in the small boat; two gallons. To noon, made 108 miles S. by E.; have made near proper course.

At 1 P.M. broke my sextant in a fall and hurt self badly in awkward tumble on coaming of cockpit. Patched up sextant and adjusted it by wedging the horizon glass with small wad of paper; but lost the chance of a sight. Same lurch that capsized me and sextant jolted chronometer out of shelf into water. Leak gaining. Pump every two hours. No fear of getting too much sleep. Unless decent change comes, shall hoist ensign, Union down, to-morrow. Lat.  $30^{\circ} 41' N.$ ; Long.  $70^{\circ} 39' W.$  Both dead reckoning.

*August 22.* 5 A.M. Set full mainsail, roughly patched. Started to split again. Took it in. Ran under jib alone, making S. one-quarter W. Made seventy-four miles these twenty-four hours.

At 6 P.M. stood north with three reefs in patched mainsail. Reckoning gives little to southward of Bermuda's latitude.

*August 23.* Stood north all forenoon. Log not registering. No observation. Latitude is uncertain; impossible to get longitude since watch stopped when flung into water on cabin floor. Restarted it by approximation, but utterly unreliable. Hoisted ensign, Union down, at noon. Distance from S.H. 695 miles. Log often fouled by gulf weed.

## GETTING ON

*August 24.* At noon got a sight. Lat.  $34^{\circ} 29'$ ; Long.  $65^{\circ} 52'$  W. (long. by dead reckoning). Am above Bermuda's latitude. Stood south.

*August 25.* Course to St. David's Head should be E.S.E. At noon distance from S.H. 723 miles.<sup>1</sup> Made good S.E. by E. until 5 P.M. More southerly then. Reckon 221 miles to Bermuda.

*August 26.* Drifted all day. At 4 P.M. an American armed merchant steamer stopped in answer to my distress signal. She proceeded when I showed her my empty water-jugs. Damn her! Course to Bermuda east.

*August 27.* Second jib burst in forenoon. Spent several hours making it good. Then stood northerly till 11 P.M. Lay-to until morning; sea getting up: thought to get ahead on rest. Cannot sleep. Seem to have forgotten how.

*August 28.* Sailed S.E. by E., sea making up heavily again. Hove-to at noon to try for good observation; made twenty-eight miles S.E. these twenty-four hours. Lat. by observation  $32^{\circ} 35'$  N.; long., dead reckoning,  $65^{\circ} 55'$  W. Longitude is doubtless in error; if longitude is anywhere near correct, should be about fifty miles from Bermuda reefs.

*August 29.* Calms and faint easterly airs. At 2 P.M. heading S. by E. 6 P.M. Calculated had again reached latitude to run down and stood east.

*August 30.* Hove-to and unbent jib, which had parted from the roping and had started to go altogether. Bent on the only remaining spare, a baby-jib. Wind flukey. At noon stood N.N.W. At 6 P.M. could lay no nearer course than S.E. Fell flat calm and lashed down everything to save spars and sails in heavy swell.

*August 31.* 6 A.M. Light air from east.

10 A.M. Drifting again. Made only ten miles N.W. these twenty-four hours. Breeze freshening at 12.30 P.M. Distance logged from S.H. 1042 miles. (Direct distance to Bermuda from New York is but 670 miles.)

4 P.M. Small brown and yellow land bird settled on the rail and stayed all night. Spared it a spoonful of water.

*September 1.* Wind freshening in puffs. Sounded; twenty fathoms. Fish plentiful. Should put sloop about thirty miles S.E. of Gibbs Hill. Latitude has been correct; longitude apparently more greatly in error than imagined. All afternoon very faint air; drifting about east.

*September 2.* 6 A.M. Dead calm.

<sup>1</sup> These distances are those shown by log, not actual straight-line distances.

7 A.M. Making bare steerage-way. Drifted nearly all these twenty-four hours. Feeling need of liquid. Dog looks pitiful.

*September 3* Drifted three miles in four hours in afternoon. Afternoon calm and hot. Drifting about N.E. These two days of calm are blazing hot. A sailor's curse upon the master of that steamer that refused me water eight days ago. Last can of fruit and last tobacco gone to-day. One scant quart of water left for dog; six bottles of spoilt beer for me. Scared to drink it; soured during previous shaking up. No more lime-juice. Have logged 1075 miles.

*September 4.* Barometer falling sharply. Faint breeze at 3 A.M. from N.E. At noon breeze freshening from N.E. Reckoning places sloop in latitude of the islands. Whether longitude is in error too much or too little, shall find out in time. Have not seen a ship for nine days. Smoked rope-yarns mixed with tea to-day. Dog and self had a waterless day for practice. No signs of land yet. Good thing, with rising wind. Reefs bad neighbours. Renewed earrings of mainsail. Hope she'll hold together. Poor stuff. Wind and sea rising.

5 P.M. Tacked to E.S.E.

9 P.M. Strong gale.

9.25 P.M. Mainsail started to go, cloth by cloth.

10 P.M. Three cloths left, in luff.

*September 5.* 6 A.M. Tremendous seas. Leaking seriously. Barometer 28.80. Terrific gale. Sloop's gear a wreck. Pumping half an hour every two hours.

NOON. Baby-jib flew to leeward in ribbons. Weather wicked. Something parting every minute now. Seas sweeping sloop. Cannot stand or breathe on deck for the wind. Hanging on and hoping. Gale seems to have reached a climax. A watery hell. Lull about noon. Seas tumbling in from all sides. Caught basin of rain-water. Sea came aboard and spoilt it. Wind shifted suddenly to S.W. and blew harder than ever. Sharp squall laid sloop down and carried away everything below. Looked for damage and found last fresh water upset.

2 P.M. Making drift S.W. by W.

4 P.M. Complete hurricane. Swept heavily. Leaking all over. Through night the same. Sour beer smashed and lost. Not sorry. Poisonous, probably. Decks continually swept. Some time around midnight, took big sea to leeward, where boat is lashed down. Burst lashings, carried boat away. Pitched head first down cabin and hit on head by a shrapnel fuse paper-weight. All below a wreck. Dog buried under ladder and wreckage. Boat has smashed in side of cabin-house

and, in going adrift, broke off main-boom four feet from mast. Very bad outlook. Broken boom is hammering at the hull, held by wire sail-lacing. Cut it adrift, after unknown hours of labour with chisel, holding on to shrouds when submerged and working when clear of water.

September 6. Noon. Moderating. Raining hard. Nothing left to catch water. Everything impregnated with salt. Drifting under bare poles, easterly, about one mile an hour. Barometer rising slowly. Seas very steep. All awash below. My books ruined—pulp and slime of paper and glue.

All forenoon clearing wreck aloft and trying to make sail. Bent old mainsail remnants to gaff, rolled up foot and secured it with reef points. No boom, tied sheet to bunched-up clew. No headsail. Ship steers wildly. Hope something heaves in sight. Dog getting red-eyed. Poor brute. Am having queer illusions of big drinks. Want to drink one big bucket of clear salt water—looks so good. Steering east, getting somewhere.

5 P.M. Won't steer under this rig. May do better with more wind. Then good-bye mainsail. Sighted nothing in twelve days. Would buy a pail of water for 20 dollars. Dog satisfied to get the liquor from a can of peas. I get the peas. Very thirsty. Hope some vessel will give us water. I could drink what the dog drinks, but hate to kill her. So patient, though she's suffering.

6 P.M. Another windy sunset. Oh, well! Seem to have drifted about one mile since noon. Reckon it four. Log not registering. All night wracking about in calm. Never blows anything but calms or hurricanes here.

September 7. 7 A.M. Light air from east.

8 A.M. Throat is awfully raw. Wonder how the kiddies are. Have thrown my pistol overboard. Mustn't shoot dog. Her little drop of liquid wouldn't help me to sleep when I thought of her. If the kiddies knew their daddy was drifting around helpless less than fifty miles away, they'd get some Navy man to come out after me. Six hours of decent sailing would raise the island. My *Nautical Almanac* got washed to pulp with the rest. Must guess at declination. A kid's jingle runs through my head all day: *Ibbetty, bibbetty, sibbetty sab*, which ends with *Out goes she to the bottom of the deep blue sea*.

Must shake this off. Keep scribbling to employ my mind. Somebody may read it. To allay thirst try pouring thin stream of cool sea-water down spine from kettle-spout. Not bad. When I get ashore I shall order: one imperial pint of beer, one large jug of iced coffee, one can of peaches *with* juice, one quart claret punch, and drink them all myself.



## A MODERN SINBAD

This day sail flapped, sheet caught under binnacle, and flung the compass overboard. Steer by Boy Scout pocket compass.

9 A.M. Making a bit of easting. I'm glad I had to make this passage alone. I wouldn't have anybody else go through this. A week ago I saw the reef fishes near the islands. To-day I see them again, and scan the skies doubtfully. Chewed a bullet to allay thirst. Not much good. Might be better had I taken it in usual way before pistol went overboard.

Stowed sail all day to save chafing it to pieces.

September 8. Awoke deathly sick. Chewed tea-leaves to-day. Better than bullet. Got a rough sight. Reckon about thirty miles from Bermuda.

4 P.M. The faint air of the day seems to die towards evening.

MIDNIGHT. Flat calm. Keenly listening for those reefs.

September 9. 5 A.M. Faint air. My sextant is badly out of true. Do my best with it, want a sight at 9.

9 A.M. Take a sight. Give dog last can of salmon, gravy and all. Poor old girl. She wags her tail bravely. Work up sight.

Here the actual sea-log ends. As I was working up the sight, I raised my head and saw a steamer right astern. The continuation in my log-book is as follows:

The American patrol-vessel *Niagara* overhauled me, stopped, and asked my trouble. I asked for water. She gave me water, fruit, a bone for the dog, and a towline. Gave dog all the water she could hold. I drank until I nearly burst. All I have to do is steer, and write up this log. I asked the vessel's name. A facetious officer called out, "Suicide patrol!" Good luck to her!

She plucked me right into Grassy Bay. Everything that would float came out to meet me, full of eager, friendly Bermudians. A black seaman on the *Powerful* tug shouted, "Whar dat dawg?" I lifted her up, and the crew gave her three cheers.

Ashore at 7 P.M. Family glad to see me. Bermudians had been awfully good to them. There was not a man in the islands who expected me to arrive. Big steamers had foundered in that hurricane. But not one person ever whispered that fear to my little ones. It was fine to gather my girls to me, who had never lost faith in me.

"Daddy, we knew you'd get here," they said.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### BERMUDA

BERMUDA ought to have remained my permanent abode, for of all the places that I have been in the tiny island colony is the most charming, its people the most lovable. We rented a pretty cottage on the harbour, behind Saltus Island, and settled down. The girls were sent to the High School, quite one of the best girls' schools anywhere, and I felt no more uneasiness about them. Before I left New York Bob Davis had introduced me to Geraldine Farrar, who wanted one of my stories for a motion-picture. The cheque for that came to hand, and funds were ample—everything seemed right.

My little sloop was badly battered, and had to go under repair; meanwhile I went to work amid perfect surroundings. Bob Davis wrote me: "Don't sit down there facing the sunset, you old sailorman. Write, and send me your stuff. Not even Conrad or Kipling shall have precedence over you, for they have not sailed small boats through hurricanes and Heinies. Write, or my curse be upon you!"

Arthur Hoffman, editor of *Adventure*, wrote: "A reader who was one of the crew of the *Niagara* has written to me saying that his ship picked up a man and a dog in a small boat after the big hurricane, and when given water after five days' thirst the man gave water to his dog before he drank. I'm darned proud to know that such a man is associated with this magazine. Send me some stuff as soon as you can."

Yes, things were looking up. We could now have a maid, and I hoped to see my girls grow up in the way I yearned to have them grow. Still, it was not going to be easy. My wife made a friend of the black maid, took her into the drawing-room as a companion, and then, when she was out of the house on her afternoon off, went into her room and searched her belongings for soap. Of course the black wench

stole soap. What black maid wouldn't, when treated as she was treated?

The girls made friends at school, but their parents never called on us after the first time. My wife cultivated their servants rather than themselves, and very soon we found ourselves beyond the pale. We had a telephone in the house, and although my wife at first insisted that she would never use the new-fangled thing, she soon took to it, and spent hours talking over the wire to an acquaintance she formed, telling bawdy stories and making comments about my stuck-up habits.

"He says even the rain's beautiful here. He's laying down on the floor now, in what he calls his study, watching ants pull a cockroach to bits. Fascinating, he calls it. Mad, I think he is, but he won't worry me."

I heard that choice bit one morning, and it stopped my work for the day. I went in to the Club and got drunk.

Towards the end of the year a climax arose. I had found it almost impossible to write in such an atmosphere. One afternoon there was a terrible row. The woman taunted me with my inability to get rid of her, and I struck her, hard. In an instant I was sorry, ashamed of myself for letting go. But it was done, and nothing could ever undo it. She took her bruised chin down to the school, and waited for the girls, then dragged them home, as once before she had dragged them to Venette Herron's place, screaming to them to look at what their lovely daddy had done to her—their lovely stuck-up daddy who knocked their mother about for nothing at all.

I gave up the house, rented a smaller one for the family, and leased an island for a year. There, with my boat and my dog, I remained and wrote in solitude. Once a week an old negro boatman brought me bread and rum; once a week I sailed over to Hamilton and took the girls out for a picnic; but I never saw my wife. During that year I got a great deal of work done, and my first novel was published by a first-class publisher—Little, Brown, of Boston. Admiral Napier dropped in at my island one day, and I made a splendid friend. He sent his coxswain over for me and I visited the fine old Admiralty House, and had the privilege of examining the

records left by a former Admiral of the Station. These gave an amazing illustration of Bermuda's stalactitic growth. One hundred years previously a huge segment of stalactite was cut off and sent to a great London museum, measurements being carefully recorded of the stump, with a request that after a hundred years new measurements be taken to determine the rate of formation. I saw the new growth—a hundred years of it—one inch long and of needle fineness. The piece from which the stalactite had been cut was as big as a dining-table top. It made me think, then smile, at the wise and pontifical pronouncements of learned men who try to tell us the age of the earth, and foretell the date of its final collapse.

I formed a theory about Time. What is Time? Is it not simply a word invented or adapted to imply process of change? Is there such a thing as Time at all? Death is certain, and so is change, but little else can be. One may dispute as to whether change is progress, but none dare soberly dispute change itself. Every time some scientist or excavator comes upon final and—to him—indisputable evidence that the earth is so old, can exist so long, somebody else in a hitherto unknown spot on the globe uncovers remains of a civilization which was old before what was previously accepted as the beginning of Time. There are wise men who claim that civilization has reached its peak in our age, and that little remains to be learnt about our world, that the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages were bad times for benighted men, unenlightened and primitive; but a thousand years from now this century will be the Middle Ages, in two thousand years we shall be spoken of as the people of the Dark Ages; and this old world will still spin round, and wise ones then, as wise ones do now, will make their discoveries and believe that they represent the highest achievable development of Man.

Why must there have been a beginning to this earth? Why an end? Surely those are assumptions of people who cannot conceive any other reason or origin than manufacture or magic. This universe was never blown into being like a soap bubble, nor will it collapse and vanish like one. The tale of the Creation is amusing, but only to be taken seriously

by the credulous. I have heard parsons say that they do not believe it—yet I never knew a parson who did not teach it. Dig as we may, the beginning still remains in the beyond; and it is as fatuous to guess about it as it is to dare to foretell the end.

But here's an old sailor meddling with the professor's play-thing. Swing the mainyard, and let's go ahead.

When we had been in Bermuda over a year, I attended the school prizegiving and met my wife there. I had a thrill, and I think she did, when we saw our girls taking part in a French play, and each winning a prize for school work. They were doing very well. They were backward in Scripture, and the headmistress told me sorrowfully that they were very bright girls in everything but Bible knowledge, but in that they were complete pagans. I told her that I had not encouraged them to read the Bible, that I did not think it a fit book for young children to read, but when they reached the age of discretion they might do as they liked about it. I told her that, as a book, I would much rather give them *Dolly Morton*, or *Fanny Hill* to read—I believed those books to be far less immoral. She was shocked.

While we had lived in Great Kills, the girls had asked to be allowed to go to Sunday-school, and they went; but they wanted to quit immediately after the Christmas party, and then I told them that they might please themselves whether they went to Sunday-school or not, but, if they did, they would not be permitted to make a convenience of it for what they expected to get. They must go regularly or not at all. It was their own decision that they never went again. So many kids start going to Sunday-school a few weeks before Christmas, then quit until the next party season, and so many parents encourage it too. That seems to me utterly dishonest, though the people who permit it of course defend it.

The chief result of my attending that prizegiving, however, was that I returned home. Surely, I thought, we must now find a common interest in our growing daughters. I took a nice house on the harbour front near the Princess Hotel, and once more tried my hardest to settle down. I had a study which was apart from the house, and everything pointed to success.

It was not to be. My wife refused to have a maid, and insisted on doing her own household work, including the washing, and seemed to take a pride in appearing throughout the day, and on Sunday too, in slovenly kitchen dress. If people called, as they did at first, she left them standing outside the door while she came into the garden and bawled for me. She said, audibly, that people didn't come to see her, only me. Our garden was festooned with laundry two days a week, and on either side of us lived folks who would have been friendly. No white people of any sort of standing in Bermuda did nigger work. It just wasn't done. Gradually my work fell off again, and it was small wonder. My girls were growing up rapidly, the elder was now almost a young woman. They wanted to love me, I am certain, but their mother's influence was too fast rooted. They appreciated their school, which she did not, yet as between their mother and myself they invariably leant towards her. I suppose that was but natural. I rarely punished those girls, except to deprive them of some promised treat when they behaved unusually badly, which was not often; and the only time I ever slapped them was when they were rude to their mother. That I would never allow, but I don't believe the woman appreciated my viewpoint, or that the girls understood it.

All their trifling little faults were laid to my high and mighty notions. If one of the girls left her clothes untidily flung about her room in the rush for school, her mother would yell after her: "I never had no High School education, and I know better than to be dirty!" If one spilt a little tea on the tablecloth: "That's what your stuck-up daddy's doing for you! You don't catch me making a slop over everything, and I never went to no posh High School!"

Soon I had to sell my boat to pay my bills. My arm was terribly troublesome—when typing I could see the guides of the fingers through the open wound. I went to see Dr Tucker, and he looked shocked. He was an old Cambridge Blue and Blackheath forward, and an English Rugger cap. He didn't tell me that I'd have to lose the arm, but I think he believed no less than that. He began to treat me. Each morning

I went to him to have my wound irrigated and dressed, and after the visit I returned to my work. My Airedale had littered thirteen puppies to a well-bred dog, and I had to have her put away because the lusty little creatures seized upon a fresh scratch which she had sustained in rubbing her belly on the rocks, and tore her to pieces. The loss of my doggy shipmate hurt like hell.

Typing got too difficult for me and I engaged a girl to copy some work. She called at the house for copy, but only once, for my wife treated her as if she were bringing me a card from a bawdy house. Matters never improved, but rather got worse. There is no divorce law in Bermuda, but I believed I might get a separation with the custody of the girls, to which I was legally entitled. I saw a lawyer, who arranged for my wife to meet me at his office, but it was hopeless at the start. Had I been wiser I should have insisted upon my full legal rights and forced the matter, but I showed weakness then, as I had done before.

"I don't know what you got me here for," said my wife. "I never done anything to cause you to do this, and I won't do anything about it. You'll never have the girls. They won't leave me. You see."

When the girls heard about it, as of course they speedily did, I found myself quite ostracized in my own home. Things were desperate. I was feeling murderous, and almost afraid of myself. There could never be harmony in that home, and the incessant clash must inevitably harm my girls. I had done my level best to establish a better place in the world for them than I had enjoyed in my growing years, and quite obviously I had failed. If they chose to side with their mother, I would submit to their choice. I did discuss it with them, and of course they stated definitely that they would never leave their mother.

When I had been under Dr Tucker for two months my arm began to mend, and that was the one gleam of brightness in a stormy outlook. The doctor was patience personified; a big man, with Rugger hands, he was yet as gentle as a good woman, and by the ninth week there remained of that grievous wound only a small hole, which had a clean look.

But I must not work it too much; I still found typing beyond me. I had a long manuscript ready for copying, but dared not bring the girl home to do it; so I took a tiny office and had her do it there. That incredible wife of mine sought out the office, and again went home and told our girls all about my cleverness in having my women away from home on pretext of working for me. The poor little typist had to give it up, for she could not risk her good name.

That evening I did not go home until I had drunk myself into a dull rage, and when I reached the house I sat on the veranda until long after midnight, brooding over my predicament. The longer I brooded, the more my rage increased, and when at last I went inside and entered our bedroom the sight of the woman set my brain ablaze. My hands twitched, I wanted to strangle her, but it was not cool reason that held me back. I went to the bathroom, with an ugly thought in my mind. With a hatpin I pricked a deep hole in my arm, then rubbed it with a styptic pencil to see if I could detect the hole afterwards. I could not. I took the hatpin then to the bedroom, gently pulled aside my wife's nightdress and felt for her heart. She stirred.

"Oh, let me be, you drunken beast!" she muttered, and rolled over with a tug at the bedclothes.

While I waited for her to get soundly asleep again, I paced the house passages, and one of the girls called from her room:

"Is that Daddy? Good-night."

With a shock I came to my senses. I put back the styptic pencil, threw away the hatpin, and lay down in the veranda hammock to watch the night through to dawn. My head ceased aching as the sun came up, and at breakfast I announced to the family that I was going on a trip to New York. I took only a suitcase, a parcel of books, and a portable typewriter, leaving everything else. When I left the house I hugged those girls hard, promised to write as soon as I arrived, and to return as soon as I could. My wife would have kissed me, but I avoided that Judas salute. With a feeling in my heart that I had failed in everything worth while, I sailed for the States again, a lonely, beaten man.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### LOOKING AHEAD

GLOOMY though the prospect seemed, this second coming to New York was different from the first inasmuch as I was now more or less established in a profession. I had left all my spare cash with the family, and landed nearly penniless; but I had only to visit some friendly editor to secure funds. I had brought with me a new story, which my agent offered to have typed for me, and while waiting for the result of that story I had to consider the question of future typing. Though my arm was now healed, and in fact never again opened, the guides of two fingers were so contracted as practically to cripple me for the time being. I could not do more than type a letter without suffering exquisite agony.

Among the many correspondents who had written to me through various magazines to which I contributed was a woman in the Middle West who was apparently suffering pretty much in her home what I had suffered in mine. In the first batch of mail forwarded to me from Bermuda was a letter from this woman saying that her life was unendurable, she was coming to New York, and perhaps I would give her a letter to some editor or publisher recommending her for work. Her letters were those of an intelligent woman, and her typing was fair. I 'phoned to the address she had given me, for since she had written to me in Bermuda she had arrived by the time I reached the city. Up to that moment I had no idea what she looked like, or whether she was old or young. She proved to be about thirty, of Finnish birth, very quiet, very shy, and frightened at the big city. She had no money, and was fairly in a desperate dilemma. I had no money to spare for wages until I received a cheque for the story not yet sold. We talked the matter over in all seriousness, and in the end decided that she come to work for me, share my

lodgings and luck, and live as my sister. To make things clear to the curious world, she actually *lived* as my sister, and was received as such by editors and agents to whom I sent her with work. From the moment she joined me things went smoothly; she was as efficient as she was shy, and for once in my life I knew utter tranquillity.

The new story was sold to a famous five-cent weekly for eight hundred dollars, and according to current opinion in literary circles I had 'arrived.' I wrote another short story, that also was bought by the same magazine, and then I was asked to go down and meet the Big Chief. I don't think he took a violent fancy to me. I was too quiet, too drab, too little like an author, and lacking all the arts of flattery. But apparently I was sending him just the kind of stories he had been wanting for years and had been unable to get since another sea-dog author died, so he bought a great many stories from me at £150 apiece. By the time he soured on my work I had earned a name among the big magazines, and editors wanted my stuff, so it made little difference to me. Shortly Dr Blanche Colton Williams wrote me that I had been chosen for the O. Henry Prize Award for short stories and asked me to state that I was a naturalized American, since the Award is supposed to go to American writers only; but I was honest enough to tell her that I was not American either by birth or adoption. Mr Marquis, publisher of *Who's Who*, requested my personal data for inclusion in his big book, but that also was intended for Americans only, and again I declined the honour. In each case I must have been something of a rare bird, for inclusion in *Who's Who* and the O. Henry Award have been offered to other English authors who have not all had the backbone to refuse such publicity.

My work was going well, however, and I was able to send home ample funds and frequent gifts to the girls. The problem of living, and retaining M., who made herself indispensable to me, forced me to seek less expensive quarters. Unexpectedly I received a cheque for seven hundred dollars for an oft-rejected and forgotten serial—accepted now because my name

was worth something on the contents page of a cheap magazine—and with that cash we visited the yacht yards around New York. In City Island I bought an old schooner, abandoned and off register, but in which I saw soundness and handiness. In after years many people regarded me as a wealthy author cruising about in a fine yacht; actually, I paid just seven hundred dollars for the vessel, put her into condition myself, and got her registered in Bermuda under a new name. We took up our residence on board, and thereafter lived entirely afloat, having no other home; and during the next four years we sailed in two ocean races, cruised extensively to Barbados, Bermuda, Miquelon, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and in fact the whole Atlantic seaboard, usually having no other crew than our two lonely selves. M. undoubtedly was of Viking stock, and proved to be a splendid seawoman. Sometimes we gave a passage to young 'Varsity men who longed for a sea voyage, and I confess to a mild thrill at seeing those young bloods polishing my brasswork and washing up my pots and dishes. They appeared to derive considerable enjoyment from it, too.

I was invited to talk to clubs, and though I pleaded that I was no talker—and my sponsors undoubtedly realized the truth of that as soon as I opened my mouth—they persisted in wanting me, and I travelled far and wide in great automobiles to spin yarns to indulgent people. When the United States Navy projected making a world cruise, the editor of the *Naval Academy Magazine* asked my help in arranging the Neptune ceremony for their crossing of the Line. A gentleman wrote to me saying that he had placed on file in the library of a famous university all my magazine sea-stories, as representative of the best existing modern sea-fiction portraying the sailing-ship truly and dealing faithfully with the men of a vanishing race. Perhaps it was reasonable that I should feel a faint glow of pride. I'm not ashamed of that.

I met big business men now on equal terms. They were always strictly business at first, but the most astounding playboys in their leisure hours. I vividly remember a big party

arranged for M. and me at the home of a retired merchant: a splendid home, full of electrical gadgets, magnificently furnished and situated. Our host's notion of a good time was to throw as many big drinks into his arriving guests as they could swallow quickly, then sit back and watch events. Being a Prohibition country, the United States naturally leant towards the most powerful of liquor. The host in this case had made a drench of his own invention, which he modestly called 'tiger's milk.' He always made a brew of it before giving a party, and set several big bottles in the refrigerator to chill, so that, when wanted, the stuff was as nearly frozen as alcohol can be. He used very large glasses, and as people arrived he took the men straight to the kitchen to have one while the ladies powdered their noses. He pressed a couple of quick ones on each man, and the cold stuff went down like milk indeed, because it was so chilled that the raw kick of it was numbed; but when the belly heat got to work on that tiger's milk—oh, boy! Within half an hour I saw a most dignified elderly gentleman standing on the very top of a quite unstable stepladder, beating time with a soup ladle, and singing at the top of his voice a ribald old ditty.

At this same party a lady was suddenly missed, and we found her, fully dressed, in a bathtub, complaining that she could not get tight because she had hollow legs. Tiger's milk! Prohibition!

My second book was published this year; two more followed quickly, and I began to look ahead. I wrote to my daughters and pleaded my case for divorce. They promptly assured me that if I dared divorce their mother I need never expect to see or hear from them again. Divorce was out of the question after that, for nothing could induce me to forfeit whatever remained of their regard. No misery was bitter enough to make me risk that.

When cruising to Nova Scotia one summer I asked them to come up and spend their vacation in the schooner. The younger girl wanted to take up painting, and I offered to put her with a famous artist for tuition. They declined the invitation because their mother was not included. I would have given an

eye and a leg to have deserved such loyalty as that. Failing to persuade them to visit me, I sent them the entire cheque received for a film-story, and told them to take a trip home to England with it. The elder girl went, accompanied by a chum; but the younger would not go because there was no money for Mother to go too. That young heroine left school soon after (asking my permission first, however), went to work in Bermuda, and took her mother to England the next year. To all appearances they had no further use for me, except to send funds to them. I did that until they were both married and comfortably established.

Persuaded by friends in Bedford, Nova Scotia, we remained overlong in that lovely place and the schooner got nipped in the first ice of a long and severe winter, and we remained perforce until spring, fast in the ice in the middle of magnificent Bedford Basin, amid forest shores. Deer used to come tripping over the frozen surface to take bread from our hands. During that hard winter I had plenty of time to consider the future. Since I could do no more for my girls, and my own future seemed to be lashed to the mast of a damned bad marriage, I began to foster another ambition. I wanted to own at the same time a good automobile, an Airedale dog, a schooner yacht, and a panama hat. I bought the dog, already owned the schooner, and during the winter managed to acquire the car, a splendid Buick. I would buy the panama hat when I visited the West Indies. So that seemed to be settled. Then my fancy soared higher: I thought it would be a grand climax to sail home to England, after twenty years of exile, no longer asking for the humblest work, but sailing my own yacht, flying my own private flag, taking up my permanent anchorage in the land I still well-nigh worshipped.

That thought pestered me night and day, and I worked all the winter with a new eagerness. I was earning what would amount to a good income in England, and I saw no reason to doubt that I could do as well from England as a base as from Nova Scotia. Besides, I wanted more than anything to attain as firm a position with English publishers as I had in America, and rather foolishly believed that English closed

doors were not as fast shut in literary circles as in some others. As the weather grew milder and the ice began to crack, the plan seemed not only possible but easy of achievement. As soon as we could get out of the ice, we would sail for the Bahamas, where I meant to find some snug, remote harbour, and write at least one book, perhaps two, and a lot of short stories, so that they might be working for me while on my way home. But before finally quitting the coast it was advisable that I make a call on my New York editors; so we sailed down to Halifax and started to fit out for the summer.

For various reasons, chiefly the warm hospitality of good friends, we did not leave Nova Scotia as soon as we had intended. The officers of the cable-ship, who had been tremendously nice to us, were at sea on a job, and we disliked to leave for good without seeing them. What with waiting for their return and joining in club activities, the summer sped on, and it was not until the end of August that we sailed, M. and I alone, for the States.

That August a gale blew along the Nova Scotia and New England coasts that spread destruction broadcast. Had we been able to leave Halifax when we intended, we should have missed that gale; but now, on the day before it broke, we were drifting sluggishly somewhere off Shelburne, though out of sight of the coast. The heat had become oppressive. After my single-handed passage to Bermuda in the little sloop some shrewd fellows dubbed me "Hurricane," and it was apt, for I believe I know more about hurricanes from the inside than most people. On this afternoon I watched the barometer performing antics which made me rub my eyes.

The sky was clear, the sea like glass; nowhere could I discern signs to cause me uneasiness, yet that blessed barometer fell steadily with ominous portent. M. came up from the galley, found the mainsail furled, and saw me out on the bowsprit making fast the jib.

"Are you doing that to save them from flapping to bits?" she asked curiously.

"*Blowing* to bits," I answered, and went on snugging down, indifferent to incredulous glances. About four in the afternoon

I had the vessel under a close-reefed foresail, and every bit of canvas beyond that tied down hard with storm gaskets. The small boat was secured, and then I sat down and scanned the skies. I hoped that nobody would steam along and see us snuggled down like that, for the sky was still blue and unclouded, the sea was unruffled as a mirror; but when I took the binoculars and looked aloft I detected a bit of scud flying across the sun; the barometer went on downward. Whatever might be the ultimate event, I felt safe in the knowledge that I had done all humanly possible for our preservation. I went below for an early supper, and was down for no more than twenty minutes; but when I went on deck again, what a change!

The sky had turned slaty, the sea grey, and a sharp breeze had turned the swells into little whitecaps. In less than half an hour we were plunging heavily in a rising sea, the barometer had fallen to 29.00 and was still falling. My observations that day had given me a good fix, and I reckoned we were about thirty miles south-east of Shelburne. The wind came in from the north-east, and when it grew to gale force I hove-to on the port tack to keep her head away from that terrible coast.

By ten o'clock the wind was piping, and the skies seemed almost to foul our mastheads. Towards midnight the hoops of the foresail started to carry away, and there was nothing I could do about it beyond passing a line through the cringles and around the foremast. Every time the vessel came head to wind, and shook the sail, another hoop cracked; then one horn of the gaff jaws carried away. If that sail failed us, we were in for a thin time, I knew too well. Hurriedly I plotted our drift and calculated our position, and wondered if we could possibly make Shelburne under a foresail alone with a beam wind and sea. As if in answer to my unspoken question the wind suddenly dropped; stars came out, and I was almost fooled. But a glance at the barometer warned me, and I spent what time I was given in refastening the foresail luff to the mast. In fifteen minutes there were no stars, the wind struck down again, fiercer than ever, from the south-west; and

before the sea could take on the savage cross-drive it later attained, I got the schooner before it and ran for Shelburne, hoping, but not very sanguinely. In a bleak morning the iron coast rose ahead of us, the seas breaking sixty feet up the grim cliffs. To windward of us lay a big coasting schooner, dismasted, deserted, sinking. We could not have helped her people even had we seen anybody aboard her, for she sank as we watched her. She was ten times our size, but had lost her fight. We limped into Shelburne in the early afternoon, and hardy old coasters refused to believe that we had come through that gale alone. On that same black night the famous Gloucester fishing schooner *Mayflower* went down off Sable Island, and a dozen wrecks strewed the coast. Lucky? Well, perhaps we were—say rather a lot of luck and a bit of preparedness.

After refitting, we again put to sea, bound for Long Island Sound. One might be pardoned for thinking that after weathering that gale we could expect a fair passage, and it started out that way. A light breeze carried us down the coast, and then it fell calm with thick fog off Cape Sable. We passed a lot of wreckage, and some of it was heavy stuff. When we had flopped about off that ugly, invisible cape for two days, blinded by fog, harried by tides, barely making steerage-way, a light fair wind came along and allowed me to lay a course. I had been on deck for fifty hours without a break, and M. urged me to go below for a couple of hours at least, since we were now heading offshore safely. I believed I might take the chance, and leaving strict instructions that I be called at the slightest change in the weather, or if a steamer's syren were heard, I lay down, dressed as I was, and fell into a loggy doze.

I was awakened by a terrific thump, and the schooner quivered and rolled heavily once or twice. In ten seconds I was on deck, peering into the blinding fog, scolding M. for not calling me. Something rolled away from our stern and vanished into the whiteness, but I could not see M. I ran about the deck, calling her, but there was no answer. Listening, I could hear no sound besides the murmur of the sea. Peer as



I might, I could see nothing in the water alongside. The small boat was lashed down; I cut the lashings and launched it, still calling. Before daring to leave the ship I went to the wheel to heave the vessel to, and then discovered that whatever had struck us had broken away the rudder head from the steering gear. The schooner hove herself to, no longer held by the wheel.

For half an hour I rowed about calling; there was no answer. Something like panic seized me. If I lost the vessel in the fog— Sorrowfully I made for where I believed her to be, and rowed in narrowing circles until I bumped against her black side. M. was gone. She was a strong swimmer, and the only thing I could imagine had happened was that some heavy wreckage had fouled us from beneath, had perhaps rolled up for a moment, and M. had tried to fend it off, being dragged overboard before she could cry out. She was a quiet woman, little given to crying out, preferring to act. Her loss left me with a gnawing ache inside, and until the fog cleared I walked the deck round and round, calling hopelessly.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### PREPARATION

WHEN on my arrival in Bermuda in the little sloop a dear old lady had asked me, referring to the hurricane, "Did you pray?" I rather rudely answered her that "I was too busy to pray—I pumped!" Now, faced with a still more horrible predicament, I felt that prayer was a waste of time. I set about my job. Alone, the vessel badly damaged—how badly I did not know—in a stretch of ocean which can be thoroughly savage, self-help alone would suffice.

A brief trial convinced me that the schooner would never steer with the poor repairs I could make. When I had made shift to fasten the steering gear back to the rudder-stock I found that she would not steer at all off the wind, the strain promptly bursting adrift my best lashings. If I let her sail by the wind, she would steer herself if I trimmed her nicely. I decided to let her go to windward, and make whatever coast I happened to strike. Any coast would do as well as another. In seven days, changing my course as the wind changed, but always making roughly to the westward, I found myself among the Nantucket Shoals in a rising breeze. Then I had to take a chance with my steering gear, and navigate her through to Nantucket, which I made with little trouble beyond calling down upon myself the curses of a busy fleet of fishermen. I hauled in to a dock, and slept the clock round.

The hard labour of that voyage had benefited me in at least one respect—my useless fingers regained some of their strength. It's an ill wind that serves nobody. I reported the tragedy to the Nova Scotia authorities, in whose waters it occurred, and communicated it to all mutual friends. Many splendid friends in Connecticut offered me a home in which to recover. That I did not accept does not mean that I did not, and do not, appreciate their great kindness.

A dirty little tabloid newspaper in New York sent up a reporter who tried to get me to admit that I had dumped my shipmate overboard. I don't believe he liked my attitude, for he did not long persist. M.'s great friend, Dick, came over from Cape Cod to offer sympathy and help, and remained on board, clearing up some of my work and supervising repairs while I paid my visit to New York.

In the big city I found myself in a measure famous. People told me that I ought to show myself more, join the log-rolling crowd, capitalize my popularity as an author; but that sort of thing never appealed very greatly to me. I saw so much of it. So many people follow the loud speaker. Let a man or woman write something which, by clever advertising and ballyhoo, achieves large sales, and that author immediately becomes a wise person, and is invited to give his or her views on every conceivable subject, though the book may be—often is—tripe, and the writer of it no wiser after than before the accident. The author of a best-seller is invited to endorse all sorts of things: tobacco, beauty creams, a new religion. A book has to be pushed—the latest best-seller is approached to recommend it, and if he can honestly say no more than that the pictures or the binding are good, into the advertising goes his name in flaming letters.

No doubt I'm the fool; but if I cannot win my way without prostituting myself I am content to remain unknown. In my lifetime I have done things which the pious will call dishonest, but I have been honest enough to confess my faults. Down at bottom I revere honesty above everything. I admire the open, unashamed harlot; she is the most honest person on earth, one of the very few truly honest people.

I declined to join the log-rollers, and no doubt delayed any recognition I could have had. But all the best periodicals bought my work, and I needed no income which derived from literary harlotry.

Before leaving New York, perhaps for good, I made a quick trip to Bermuda by steamer to see my daughters. I might never see them again. I found them more than willing to be good to me; they went about with me, and I enjoyed three days of

such happiness as I had not known in my life before. Bermudians were always most friendly towards me, and seeing my girls with me on such cordial terms must have convinced even the doubters that perhaps I had good cause for quitting my family. Only one man definitely cut me. Poor, silly little fool! Ten minutes after he had passed me by, nose in the air, ignoring my hand, I met Carlisle Darrell, the Bermuda financier and shipping magnate, and was by him most cordially greeted. I hinted to him that I seemed to be under a cloud in Bermuda. He is Bermuda's solidest son, and would know.

"Captain," he said warmly, "I don't know one person in Bermuda who doesn't hold you in respect."

That gave me a glowing feeling. I could afford to forget that one slight.

I left Bermuda with a sad feeling that I had said farewell to my daughters for good; before I reached New York I had vowed it should not be. I would see them again, and in better circumstances. Now that they were grown to womanhood, their ideas must have changed, and, only let me get home to England, we would make fresh plans for a new start. I completed my business, said good-bye to my friends, and quitted the city without much regret. New York had given me much, and had taken full toll for what it had given. Friends there were whom I hated to leave; but Mac, the chief of them all, was in Abyssinia, and anyhow Mac and I would never say good-bye as long as either lived. It could never be more than so-long between us.

Much time was taken in repairing the schooner, time which might have seemed wasted but for the splendid hospitality shown to Dick and myself by Austin Strong. In his house I played with lead soldiers once owned and played with by Robert Louis Stevenson, a relative of Mr Strong. I had the thrill of reading stories in the great artist's own hand, written expressly for his young relative. Handling those sheets of scribbled paper, frail as the hand that penned them, I felt some of the romance of Stevenson creep through my bones. It was like taking the hand of the man himself.

When at last all was ready for our long voyage, two young

friends at Harvard University came to see us and we spoke of their coming long vacation. They leapt at the suggestion that they sail with us as far as Nassau, and that was the cause of a little more delay, for they would not be free until mid-June.

But we waited for them gladly, and at 8 P.M. on June 16, 1928, off we shoved from Marblehead, there being on board Dick, and Gid, and Tiff, and I. With a nice average of fair and foul weather we traversed the Gulf Stream, came into the warm seas, and reached Nassau at 10 P.M. on July 3, seventeen days out from Cape Cod. Our friends left us after a few days and took steamer north, while Dick and I set to work to find that secluded little haven in which I could pile up the manuscripts.

The Bahamas are mostly arid and uninteresting. Some timber grows, mainly springing out of horrible rock, or *débris* of rock, and there is none of Bermuda's charm about the islands. In Nassau itself something has been done in spots to make the place attractive to American seekers after liquid refreshment; but that's all, and it's not much. Bay Street, Nassau, and the seafront at Aden are two of the most blistering places on earth. The entire atmosphere of the place is "Money, money, money! Gimme, gimme, gimme!" Most of the native whites are very friendly—if they think you have plenty of money which may come their way, or if you have a nice-looking wife. There are a few very fine English or Canadian people, exiled there, however, and a stay in the hot and unlovely town may be made pleasant for a visitor. The natives dislike very much to admit that hurricanes sometimes wreak havoc there; but hurricanes are all too frequent nevertheless, and there is a feel of jumpiness about the islands not very conducive to ease of mind in a seaman.

But we cruised around, and after a very brief visit to Andros pitched upon what seemed to be a perfect anchorage in Royal Island Harbour off the end of Eleuthera. This little harbour was entirely landlocked, about a mile long by a couple of hundred yards broad; there were twelve feet of water at low tide, and the entrance barely wide enough to enter safely. To every appearance it was perfect. I could even imagine riding

out a hurricane in security. We had stored up for six months, taken in water, and arranged for our mail to be forwarded by any fishing or market boat from Nassau which happened to be passing our island. I had bought an extra heavy anchor, and when the vessel was moored I felt easy. The one fault to be found with Royal Island Harbour was that it had not one bit of beach or level land. Entirely uninhabited, now and then some natives from other islands had tried to grow pineapples, bananas, and sugar-cane there. The patches remained. There was an old well of fresh water, utterly choked up and buried in the rank scrub that covered the island. From a distance the place had the appearance of a lush tropic island; landing, one found horrible jagged rock like broken bottles to walk on, the vegetation turned out to be mostly scrub, wild bananas, paw-paws, and stunted trees whose roots had to spread to a vast extent to get a hold.

However, it satisfied me. I went to work with earnest vim, seeing in every page of typescript completed a peg nearer home. For recreation Dick and I shot at bottles, rowed about the harbour, caught rain-water to replenish our tanks, and sometimes tried to walk about the island. That was soon discontinued. Our shoes would not stand it, and our bare feet refused. Before leaving Nassau I had cleaned up all possible business; I had realized all my funds and taken them on board in good substantial English banknotes, so that when the time came to shove off for home, if necessary I could do so without going back to Nassau, calling in at any of the islands where a Commissioner resided to get my clearance certificate.

Weeks passed, and months. I worked as never before. I completed one novel, six short stories, and decided to do one more long story, putting all the manuscripts into the mail for my New York and London agents; then I'd set sail for dear old England. I had no longer a fine car, but had owned it; I had no dog, for I left my latest Airedale with friends up north, disliking to bring her down to so hot a region. I had the schooner—and would sail home in her; I had a gorgeous panama hat, bought in Nassau. All was well. I began to count the days. There was still plenty of time. When I sailed ramp-

ing home I'd wear my panama, fly all my flags, and show the world that it could never keep a good man down. I meant to visit all those people who always insisted that I'd come to a sticky end, and doff my panama to them with a bow.

Then the hurricane came. It blew for two days, and stripped the island bare to the black bone of it. In that landlocked harbour, with only twelve feet of water for our eight feet of draught, with three anchors out to full scope of chain, the schooner held on until midnight of a Sunday. Then she dragged her anchors, took the ground, and listed over. The seas swept her. No man could stand against the wind. At two in the morning one of our lifebuoy water lights was wrenched adrift, fell into the sea, and the chemical fire blazed up, filling the evil skies with a bloody glare. The sea flung it back, blazing, to land upon a tank full of petrol lashed on deck. By inches, knife in my teeth, I crawled along the seething deck and cut that murderous torch adrift, flung it far away, and saw a trick of the gale fling it back aboard. In the glare the entire harbour was lighted up. To leeward the surf flashed on the razor-edged rocks that grinned at our plight. Yard by yard the schooner bumped towards them, her three cables taut as steel rods. Just before dawn the wind fell away, and hope revived. It came again from the opposite quarter, and away we bumped again, our cables now stretched out astern. Through the day we edged nearer to that ghastly shore, more slowly as the water shoaled and the seas had to lift the vessel bodily.

At last we struck hard rock, and we waited. We expected to be hurled overboard, and shook hands in readiness, for no man could survive one minute of pounding in that surf. There was no hope of reaching the shore alive.

When all seemed at an end, the skies parted. The gale diminished. In a last screaming squall our bowsprit was jammed between two rocks and broke off, wedged too tightly to fall. In the lull that followed we scrambled over the broken spar to land, and crouched down watching for the next event. The shore was littered with our wreckage, yet the old schooner seemed whole. Everything had gone from her decks. One of the big petrol-drums clanged like doom against the rock on

which we crouched. Gradually the wind died. I made a dash aboard, hoping to rescue something at least before another squall. The squall never came, but there was nothing to save. The vessel was full of water. Books, papers, manuscript—all submerged. I secured my portable typewriter, the chronometer, and my panama hat. That was all. I stood on the slanting deck in my underclothes and hat, machine in one hand, chronometer in the other, and saw Dick emerge proudly holding one solitary tin of salmon. It is good sometimes to have a sense of humour. Our eyes met. We laughed—insanely, perhaps, but nevertheless we laughed.

There was our homegoing—and our home—gone on the wings of a big wind. Neither of us spoke of it. Of all the blows I had endured in my life this one was the most vicious. After nearly twenty years of hard slogging, all that remained lay at my feet. We ventured on board once more, seeking to save at least some money or manuscript. The hull was burst. What had not vanished into the sea through the breach was churned to a formless pulp.

“That appears to be that, Dick,” I said, and we silently returned to the shore.

For three days we lived on pawpaws and wild bananas picked out of the sea. Then along came the crew of a lighthouse from a small cay a few miles distant. Their lighthouse had been blown into the sea; and in seeking help for themselves they found us.

They took us to their wrecked home, and did everything for us that anybody could do, while waiting for something to come along to take us to Nassau. The men even spent a day diving into the water inside the schooner, trying to salvage something for us. They got our guns, and a few volumes of an encyclopædia, and some other books, all of which they tried their best to dry in the sun. But of anything worth while, nothing was saved. When at last we got a passage to Nassau, I was broke to the world again, and far, far from friendly editors. I was well on towards the sixties now, and the outlook was poor, but with Dick to help I believed we could win through, and refused to take the count. We landed in Nassau in borrowed clothes, and



kept out of sight as much as possible until I could contrive to raise a little money to fit us out again. Then we took a native boat and sailed for Andros, where a white man, lonely, had asked us on our previous brief visit to spend some time with him if ever we went that way again.

With paper purchased with borrowed cash, and my renovated typewriter, we sat down with our faces to the horizon and went into the tussle afresh. After a little while I believe we enjoyed it. What's the use of the battle when it's won? Who ever saw an old warrior content with peace? There is a thrill in effort, and in my experience the harder the labour the harder the thrill. Gradually the old hope revived ; there was still time to get home.

## ANDROS

ANDROS is very remote, though in mere miles it is not far from Nassau. On a clear night the Nassau Light may be seen from parts of the Andros shore—yet at the time we were there the mails were carried in an ancient schooner and often took six weeks. Mails were a trial, for the yacht had not been insured, the loss was absolute, and it was essential that I start earning money without delay. When I had finished writing a short story and sent it off, I had to live on hope until news drifted to me. Meanwhile there was Andros and its folk-lore.

There are Yahoos on Andros. Yassuh! Better keep yo' mouf. Down the Bight lies a great Pine Barren, thick with tall straight timber fit for spars, house pinnings, anything almost; but try to get an Androsian to enter those barrens! Nossuh! Yahoos in there. A Yahoo is too mysterious for a simple black man to face; he may, if of very strong fibre, trail along at a white man's heels to help carry out a sparstick. But alone? Never!

The Yahoo is a rogue who runs away with little children, and you can never catch him, for, when pursued and in peril of capture, the Yahoo turns himself into an ant-nest, and attaches himself to the trunk of a tree, where he looks for all the world just like a dozen other ant-heaps. Nobody can tell which is ant, which Yahoo. And if you don't believe it, the bush is full of black lumps sticking to trees or on the ground. Who are you, white man, to say all of them are ant-heaps? Of course there are Yahoos! Keep yo' mouf, white man!

There are Meremaids, too—not mermaids, but Meremaids. No? Believe me, there is proof. Right behind the Residency itself, very near, too, lies a lovely Blue Hole which has a connexion underground with the ocean; black women go there to beat their sisal, or to wash clothes, even to bathe. It was close

enough to the white man's house to be safe from evil influences ; but one day there was a panic. A woman saw a Mermaid there ! She ran out—fast—other women going in came tumbling out—faster, to burst in upon the Commissioner.

"Dar's a Mermaid in de Blue Hole, sah !"

"Ah nebber gwine dar ag'in, suh, nossuh !"

"Hah !" uttered the Commissioner, importantly. "I must look into this. Can't have you people come bothering me like this. Who saw the Mermaid ? Did you, Mistress Bullard ?"

"Nossuh, not my own se'f, suh——"

"You saw it, Lucy ?"

"I was jes' gwine down home wid ma sisal, Mistah Hellgun, an' shore es Ah stan' heah——"

"Did you *see* it ?"

"Nossuh, not to say *see* it, but Ah *heerd* it. Yassuh ! A big splash ! An' dere was watah all over de rock whar Ah bin beatin' ma sisal. Ripples all over de Blue Hole, an——"

"Ah seen him gwine under de watah lak a ba'acouter, suh," cuts in a girl of twelve, pop-eyed. "He got head lak a white lady, all slick an' smooth. He swim wid hes han's an' feet lak white lady, too."

"Off de rock she slibber, Mistah Hellgun, Ah tell yo' true," insists the young witness.

"Nebber gwine in dere no mo' !" mutters Mistress Bullard.

So another lovely Blue Hole lies deserted, for the blacks keep to their resolve ; but the Commissioner, in his clumsy, superior way, goes in later, sets a net, and catches a great green turtle that must have been fattening there since the Flood.

Andros is the home of Hags as well. If you ever see a fat, well-fed person who used to be a poor skinny wretch, it's a Hag—and watch yo'se'f ! A Hag lives by sucking vitality from sleeping people. Haven't you ever felt that your sleep has done you no good ? That your vitality is at low ebb ? Liver ? Poor digestion, you say ? Rubbish ! You've been Hagged ! Don't make any mistake about it. Don't you know about the famous Hag who, having to go to hospital after an accident, wasted away to a point of danger, then suddenly started to thrive amazingly and left the hospital fat as a tub of lard ? Several

people died in that hospital while the Hag was recovering. Don' yo' tell me, bossman!

The Hag goes out at night, when folks are sleeping and all is quiet. Then he slips out of his skin, hangs it on a bush, and sneaks into his victim's bed. He draws the vital blood and breath he needs, then silently steals away. There is but one way to catch him. If you find a Hag's skin hanging on a bush, you must swiftly fill it with red pepper—then hide, and watch. Soon the Hag comes out, looking for his skin. He tries to put it on, but he's raw, and the pepper stings. He can't understand that at all. He tries again with arm or leg. No good—the pepper gives him hell—and he dances about in anguish, shivering with cold while he burns with pepper, and then he pleads with his rebellious skin.

"'Kinny, 'kinny, 'kinny, yo' no know me? 'Kinny, 'kinny, 'kinny, yo' no know me?"

It's no use. Raw flesh and red pepper won't harmonize. Once you have filled a Hag's skin with pepper, you've got him. Try it next time you find a Hag's skin on a bush.

There are bad Sperrits who lead pickaninnies into the bush and lose them. Didn't Simmy lose his child for four days? And wasn't it found in the end not two hundred yards from home, unperturbed, and not in the least hungry? Everybody knows that a Sperrit was responsible for that. Wasn't the neighbour's pig restless and vocal every night while the child was missing? What else but a Sperrit, then? What if an ignorant white man did start a rumour that the kid had simply strayed out of sight of the hut, and had taken nourishment from the pig's rations; it was even pointed out that a smear of meal had dried upon the infant's black face; but that was sheer nonsense. Sperrits, nothing else; and that smear of yellowy-white was the mark of the Sperrit—everybody knows that.

No, you cannot banish Sperrits by ridiculing them. You must diligently search for the particular Sperrit who has done you dirt, and this is the best way to handle the situation: First turn your clothes inside out, and you must take two strands of your hair from the back and pull them around so that you can grip them in your teeth. This part is hard, and perhaps explains

why so many negroes fail to catch the Sperrit. Then you must set forth armed with a rule, to measure the Sperrit when you catch him. That is the stuff to give 'em! That cooks their goose. A Sperrit's mortal clay has been measured for his coffin when he died. That's all right. The Sperrit can leave his imperfect prison, and return to it at will. But only let him be caught and measured again! Ah! Then back he goes to his coffin, never again to roam. No Sperrit can survive a second measuring. This, like everything else in Andros folk-lore, is entirely capable of proof. Anybody can prove it. All you need is a common carpenter's rule—and a Sperrit.

Here are religion and superstition running neck and neck. The man who sings loudest in church, who in the parson's absence along shore may read the lessons, who most devoutly confesses his sins at every opportunity—with reservations all his own—this is the man who will most seriously assure you that a Sperrit chased him out of the barren when he went to cut him a scullin' oar. The man who turns his clothes inside out, and takes a rule to measure the Sperrit who led his child astray, is a noted pillar of the most gorgeously ceremonial church in the island. He can tell you all about the Stations of the Cross, and follow the 'Varsity-trained padre in all the contortions, changes of raiment, gaudy routine of a service so showy that it seems grotesque in such a place; but he will not go into the Pine Barrens for fear of Yahoos, he knows that you have only to take a pinch of earth from a grave, leaving a penny on the ground in payment, and sprinkle it upon a rival's corn patch effectually to witch that crop and ruin his rival.

Beauty and appalling filth run side by side, too. A picture of the Andros shore is a bit straight out of the soul of beauty. Just behind the beach are coconut groves, white wells, little houses. A buzzard will tell you where a dead dog, a dead goat, cat, or fish lies rotting in the sun. A swarm of chickens infest every patch of Kaffir corn. A horde of half-starved, diseased, nameless curs roam some of the settlements, stealing eggs, killing goats, digging up corruption to eat. The people know or care little about cleanliness as the white man regards it. Food is cooked in places so foul with old food, roaches, dogs and

chickens, that the unaccustomed stomach revolts. Here and there are signs of an attempt having been made to improve things—but it rarely happens that the effort is sustained, for few white people who visit the remoter settlements stay long enough. If some truly benevolent association would send, instead of more parsons with bell, book, and confessional, a really competent, kindly, human medical missionary to Andros, a tremendous good could be wrought for a cheerful, lovable community.

Parsons are almost as common as conchs in the Bahamas, and one result of their teaching the creed of "Ask and receive" is a community of cadgers. Everywhere you find the outstretched hand. "Please, suh, gimme one shillun!" "Please suh, yo' gimme one thruppence!" Modest ones ask for "a coppah, suh"; and the enterprising youth who begged for twopence to buy him books certainly deserved to get on.

There are good Sperrits, as well as bad, on Andros. The Chickchannies are kindly fairies who will not only leave you alone if you don't pester them, but will teach you secrets of medicine that can never be learnt in colleges. Woe to you if you offend them, however!

The Chickchannie makes his nest in a curious fashion. First he draws down the top of three tall pine-trees. Then he weaves his nest between the tops, and swings happily aloft while the trade-wind blows. I asked an old sponge fisherman how big these nests were, for I had tramped through a lot of land without seeing any. He told me "As big as a dinghy bo't, suh!"

Now a dinghy boat is quite large. Sinbad's roc could hardly need a bigger nest. Moreover, my fisherman had reliably informed me that he had seen on Skeleton Cay a boa-constrictor that "swallowed a Jersey cow," and proved it to me by showing me the crashed trail made by the serpent. It was coincidence, of course, that the serpent's trail lay directly between a landing place and a boat haulage.

This honest man indignantly assured me that there is no truth in the statement of an American 'bugologist' that the Chickchannie's nest is nothing more than a cunningly woven structure made by insects, is never bigger than a bushel

basket, and never, never, never can it be found adhering to more than one tree.

"Ain't Ah seen it, suh? Ain't Ah know Mistah Billy Bowleg, dat cuah eberty'ing 'cept a witchin'? Mistah Bowleg he cuah fevah, mis'ry, stomick clamp, eberty'ing. How he got dat powah? Tell me dat. He wuz ca'ied away by Chickchannies, dat why. Dey tell him all de yarbs, an' de ruts, an' de cha'ms, an' he done cuah t'ousan' folks on Andros. Ef yo say dey ain't no Chickchannies, go right oveh de hill beyant de Blue Hole, an' yo kin see whar Mistah Bowleg drap out o' de Chickchannie's nest an' lef' de three pine-trees all apa't, wid bits o' de nest stickin' to ebery one o' dem."

"But has anybody ever seen a Chickchannie?" the foolish may persist.

"Yassuh! Didn't ol' Sturru'p 'most ketch de tail o' one o' dem? An' ain't yo' seen ol' Sturru'p yestiddy, his neck all twisty, an' his eye 'most daid?"

Now Sturru'p was a very real person, his twisty neck was real, and his 'daid' eye. Proof? If more were needed, wasn't there the case of the great Chamberlain firm of England, Empire-builders, who tried to develop a sisal plantation at Andros North End? What happened to them? Failure, rank and utter. And why? Reports said it was due to shipping difficulties and two bad seasons in succession; but Androsians know better. Those Chamberlain woodcutters, clearing the land for sisal, deliberately cut down along with the trees too many Chickchannies' nests. Even Birmingham must bow before the Chickchannies; and there is a rotting pier and a rusty railroad near Mastick Point to prove it.

Andros is at its best on Guy Fawkes' Day. England knows no such thrill. The Andros ceremony is different with all the terrific difference that will always exist between African and Caucasian natures. Elaborate guys are made, one usually coming from each tiny settlement, and it is the grown men and women who parade the guys before the final orgy. Every habitation, however poor, is visited by the procession, and as the time goes on the chanting of doggerel rhymes rises to frenzy. Often the parade pauses, and a man or a woman takes

each a guy in a lascivious hug and dances with it to the tom-tom throb and the clamour of hoarse voices. Under the cunning hands of born prestidigitateurs those effigies come to life. Guys dance with their human partners until it is hard to tell in the torchlight which is living flesh, which the dead image. In the beginning, however, there seems to be a restraint—perhaps because the Commissioner is looking on; and he must be amused, not affronted, until he has donated the few shillings expected of him to buy rum with.

It is later, down shore, that you will see the real thing, but only if your presence is unsuspected. There, on a secluded bit of level beach, with a background of feathery palms, is erected a crude gibbet, and round it are piled faggots. Except for the flicker of torch-wood splinters the scene is African in its blackness. Just a few yards away is the inevitable grogshop, and the grog fund has already been drawn upon. The chant takes on a new note. The tom-tom gives a shivery suggestion of savagery. With the first leaping flames of the ignited faggots all restraint goes up in the air. Here is Africa!

The leader steps forward with his guy into the fire glow, his black face awork, his powerful body trembling with excitement. It is no effigy he is going to slaughter, but the true Guy Fawkes. He shakes it savagely.

“Yo’ all knows de reason we bu’n yo’,” he shouts. “What yo’ do, hey?” He thrusts his face close to the guy’s grotesque mask, and the frenzy of his shaking grows to a terrible pitch. “Yo’ bad ole man! Yo’ sot gunpowder in de King’s own cellar an’ ’temp’ to bu’n up de Pa’li’ment Hall ob de King! Yassuh! Yo’ bad ole villin! Yo’ wicked—ole—Guy Fawkes! Now we gwine to bu’n yo’ to deaf!”

He winds up his harangue while circling slowly about the fire, and others step forward and fall in behind him with their guys. When he stops shouting, there are four couples circling the fiery gibbet, and the goatskin tom-tom beats maddeningly. About the fire nothing remains but Africa—Africa shorn of the white man’s trammels—Africa herself, vibrant and alive.

The crowd chants louder, clapping hands, stamping bare feet on the hard-packed sand until it sounds like boots on a



floor. Each guy, manipulated with devilish cleverness, is as madly dancing as the quivering human who holds it. A man yells, whirling his guy until the twigs and leaves fly out of it, and plunges across the blazing fire. A woman, nearer a hundred years old than fifty, grizzled and skinny, weighing no more than five stone, clasps her guy to her reedlike body with horrible lechery and makes it perform actions far too lifelike to be funny. She goes mad. She springs through the fire, her body writhing with a fiendishly regained sinuosity, lithe as a seventeen-year-old girl, lewd as Lais, and a hundred pairs of clapping hands make a sea of sound above which the tomtom rhythm flows like a tidal wave.

The circle closes in. The dancers have lost themselves completely from the earth. The guys they hug are no effigies now; they are living, naked human beings of boiling blood, and the pantomime grows still more lifelike. White rolling eyes glare out of black faces so streaming with sweat that they appear to be lacquered. Small children, panting, hang on to the chant with voices so hoarse that they shock the ear. They might better issue from the lungs of asthmatic old age. The fire has grown infernal; the glare turns the creaming surf to blood; the dancers stagger, losing their strength but never their frenzy. The very last expiring actions they impart to their guys are more suggestive than ever—it is the climax: you feel that it must be the climax, for human flesh and blood and bone could never go on.

Suddenly the leader springs aside with a yell. Somebody unhooks a rope which has been hitched out of the fire's reach, and swiftly it is fastened about the necks of all the guys in a bunch. Up they go to the gibbet head, to hang like veritable Tyburn malefactors, heads awry in ghastly realism, feet and legs already burning and sending forth a reek of mouldy old rags.

Somewhere among the rags of the leader's guy a packet of gunpowder has been hidden. The fire touches it, and a loose, bellowing explosion scatters rags and embers in a red screen. The grog-shop keeper comes forward with some black bottles, and the crowd caper in one last mad riot through the fire as

their hoarse throats squall forth a final crazy vituperation. The ropes burn through and the guys vanish into ashes; but by that time the volatile blacks have already forgotten Guy Fawkes in favour of Arteaga—who makes the powerful rum they love so well.

Nobody hears the poor padre complaining to the Commissioner that he has had no congregation and has had to ring the bell himself.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### LIGHT AHEAD

THREE months after I had sent off that first story my agent wrote me that it was sold to the *Saturday Evening Post* and the cheque would follow in due course. I had sent off another story long before, working among swarming ants, cockroaches as big as my thumb that stank horribly when squashed, and sandflies which are beyond description, worse than the fiercest mosquitoes ever known. I was hopeful that my stay need be but brief.

For food there were peas and rice, conchs, and yams, with an occasional treat of tinned stuff sent to me on credit by a kindly Nassau merchant who had faith in me. He was an Englishman, having strong leanings towards America, and had married a native Bahamian woman. I think he was lonely, so had a place in his regard for me; for he obtained whatever I asked for, even unto the tools of my writing trade, and put all on his bill. That bill was mounting up, and the cheque was still expected. Then came another letter from my agent saying that the second story had also been bought by the *Saturday Evening Post*. Those two cheques, when they did turn up, would amount to a considerable sum, and I was anxious to get them. I had been on Andros nearly six months now, and no money had come to hand. The last letter from my agent was signed by his wife, and I thought I smelt trouble.

I took passage in a sponge vessel to Nassau to look things over, and among the accumulated mail I found on arrival there was a letter which told me that my elder girl was going to England to be married. That was an event which I had always hoped to be able adequately to recognize, and now that it came and caught me all aback, as it were, I was staggered. My daughter must not have her wedding marred through the absence of any gift from me. I was convinced that the funds

which I expected would arrive at any moment, and in that belief I wrote a cheque for £50 on my Nassau bank—where I had no funds to speak of—and sent it off to Bermuda with my blessing. Day after day I went to the post office for news, but none came, and I grew frightened, for I had never in my life before taken a chance with a bank, and I knew that to draw a cheque against “No Funds” was a serious matter. My eyes were troubling me, my luck seemed to have deserted me, and altogether I was in a bad way.

It was by the sheerest accident that I picked up an old New York paper on a shop counter, and glanced idly through it one day. A heavy leaded notice stabbed me in the eye—the notice of the death of my agent, who had been a well-known literary man himself. I felt stunned. But that same day a letter arrived from the widow, saying that my cheques were in her hands, though she could not remit to me until her husband’s affairs were wound up and she obtained power to administer his estate. Bang! Just like that! And that damned cheque which I had sent to my daughter was about due back from Bermuda.

Off I went to see the bank manager, and to him I made complete confession, telling him the precise truth about my girl’s wedding, showing him the letters which announced to me the sale of work, and the letter of my agent’s widow. The manager was most decent, but he made it quite clear that to draw a cheque against a barren account was a serious offence; he advised me to wait and see if the cheque were presented before funds arrived to meet it, and if it happened so, he would do his best to make it easy for me.

I had brought to Nassau with me a new story, and had sent it off to the *Saturday Evening Post* direct. The editors cabled me that it was accepted, and the cheque for that story came to hand on the very day that my almost dud draft was presented for payment. I could meet it—and I breathed freely again.

The next day all the delayed funds arrived, and for a moment it looked as if we might start at once for England. But there was overdue money to send to Bermuda, I owed about seventy pounds in Nassau, and while I was going about paying bills I

met a native from Eleuthera who astonished me with the news that my schooner had been patched up and floated! I didn't believe that, for I had given the vessel up; but the man was definite, so Dick and I started off to have a look. We took passage on a little sponge sloop, and it may be believed that we strained our eyes for a sight of our old ship's masts long before we had need to.

Sure enough, there she lay at last, floating peacefully at her anchors, to all outward appearance intact. I was not sure that she looked so good as I drew nearer, for she seemed to me to be broken in the sheer. The lighthouse men who had taken us up after the hurricane, however, assured me that she had not leaked a drop since twenty negroes and the four white men had dug and hauled at her and dragged her by main force into deep water. They had put a patch over the burst hull, and when we stepped on board the floor was indeed dry. I tried the pumps, and found no water. There was the matter of the broken bowsprit, for we could not sail her without head sail; but that was temporarily made good with a heavy plank picked up on the beach, and when we had set up the stays and bent the sails, all seemed well, and we set out for Andros. I had paid the men £50 for their work, and I had little money left, so it was my intention to sail down to the Mangrove Cay beach, put the vessel ashore high and dry among the coconuts, and have her repaired at my convenience in a place where labour was cheap.

We did manage to sail her ninety miles, before a fair wind, and she leaked scarcely a drop; it was when I hauled up for the reef entrance that the truth dawned upon me, for as soon as she lay over, she leaked like a basket. Within half a mile of the beach on which I meant to haul her up her seven-ton iron keel dropped off, she sank under us, and finally departed. She had broken her keel when she was first wrecked, and her soundness was but a sham. Oh, well—it had been a hopeful interlude.

I had secured a new agent in New York, and went back to work. Now we accepted an invitation to stay with the Methodist missionary and his wife at Staniard Creek, in the

North Island. Molly and Jimmy were dear folks, kindly Yorkshire farmer stock, and they laboured heroically in a pretty hopeless vineyard. I could have wished they were employed in some more useful field, some of their own Northern industrial slums, for instance. But, of course, there is no romance in industrial slums where skins are white.

For seven more months we toiled. My new agent wrote me that an editor wanted me to do a series of short stories for him, so I chose a character which I had made popular with that magazine and plunged into the job with vim. Just before the 1929 hurricane I sent away the first two stories, and they were accepted. The cheque for even those two short stories would take us home. Then the hurricane. Staniard Creek was devastated; the little settlement was inundated, and houses were blown into the sea. One night in the manse we fed seventy refugees from ruined huts, with their children and their dogs. They had all been washed out of their poor homes before the sea destroyed them. There were drowned pigs, dogs, and fowls all over the place. In the morning we saw an old woman sitting on the bare floor of her hut, which had been blown from over her head. She rocked to and fro, thanking God for life, with a shrewd eye on the white strangers and what they might be carrying. God appeared in this case, as in many another in hurricane countries, in the guise of a couple of white heathen, who sent off to Nassau for stores and clothing, and fed the hungry and clothed the naked. Dick and Molly, Jimmy and I, visited every hut or site with parcels, and it was the missionary or God who got the thanks, though it was Dick who did most of the work and I who paid the bills.

Immediately after the hurricane, when the rest of the series had been sent off, my agent wrote regretting that a change of editors had taken place and my series would not be wanted. That was a black eye; but I didn't mind very much, because I had been paid for two stories of the six, and that payment stood. It did mean that we could not yet go home, for most of those payments had been expended in feeding and succouring the hurricane victims.

It puzzled us that so much dependence should be placed on

private aid after a disaster, for in that tiny settlement of less than six hundred people there were no less than five different sects: Roman Catholics, with a white priest, Anglican, with a white priest, Methodist, with our Yorkshire friends, Baptist, with a black parson, and Holy Jumpers who needed no regular leader but had at the time a real black shepherd from the rum island of Bimini. It seemed to be a formidable array of parsons to be so helpless.

Once more my agent wrote optimistically, sending me an order for a serial for one of my old magazine markets. It took a month of driving work to do it, but that serial was completed, sent off, and accepted promptly. When the cheque should have arrived, a letter came instead, saying that before the cheque had been put through the magazine had gone out of business.

Dick and I looked blankly at each other. When our schooner was finally wrecked, I had saved the spars and traded them for a little cay down the coast. We wondered whether we could make our home on it; in fact we had for some time been accumulating material there. But the recent hurricane had swept that cay bare, and it was useless to regard it as any sort of permanent abode. If we were doomed to spend the rest of our lives on Andros, however, we must make some arrangements, for we could not remain for ever with the missionary. While we were in a sort of daze, still another letter from my agent reported the sale of an old serial for a comparatively small price—but that price would see us home. We looked at each other.

“Shall we?”

“Dare we?”

“We will!”

In January 1930 off we sailed for Nassau. When all debts were paid, and funds counted up, we found that if we took a cheap steamer and went carefully we could just get home with a few pounds left over. Our farewells were brief, for long farewells cost money. There were the bank people, and the few tradesmen who had shown us kindness; Dr Hare and his gracious wife, and Tommy, their splendid daughter; Captain Millar, of the jail, and his nice little wife and their fine boys.

It really cost a wrench to bid these people good-bye, for it was scarcely likely that we should ever visit the Bahamas again from choice.

While on our way to Jamaica in the *Lady Somers* we more closely calculated our resources, and found that if we went very keenly to work, we might land in Plymouth with twenty pounds; so that was our object, and we went moderately on outfit, and kept our cash for bar expenses and tips, for we believed we had earned a couple of weeks of relaxation. Another thing I had calculated was that if the banana-steamer which we took from Kingston kept up to her schedule, I would arrive home just about twenty years after my last crossing in the scullery of the *Philadelphia*.

There were very few passengers, only two males in the saloon, and I had a dinner-suit, so was placed at the captain's table. How splendid! The last time I had made the Atlantic passage I had been peeling potatoes and washing pots. It was not a very gorgeous steamer, and not a very splendid captain, as Atlantic steamers and captains go, but eating the skipper's grub was better than peeling the skipper's spuds, and things were undoubtedly looking up.

That was a boring passage. I watched the chart in the smoking-room, and grew irritable because the daily dot advanced so slowly. Actually the old steamer was doing very well, and the weather remained very kind.

I read a lot, finding in the library a heap of English papers and literary reviews. I, being about to crash the literary gate, was intensely interested. The outlook took on alarming colours. Authors seemed to review each other's books, publishers wrote, published, and reviewed books. And I, a poor unknown, was daring to tackle this game! For the first time I feared for the future. But just before we expected to make England's coast, the captain's steward came to me with an autograph-book, shyly requesting me to write a sentiment in it.

"Why on earth do you want my autograph?" I asked in amazement.

"I've read a lot of your stories, sir," he said.

Well, that was something else again. I was not as unknown



to Englishmen as I had feared. I wrote in his book: "When you're up against a slugger, and you feel that you simply must quit, don't forget that the other fellow's quite as groggy as you are. That's the time to wade in."

Perhaps it was not original, but it seemed to me to be a good motto, and the lad went away quite pleased with himself. After all, he might easily have heard about me. Somebody had to read the hundreds of magazine-stories and books I had published. Prospects for England did not seem so bad after all.

Then up spiked the Bishop's Light, with foam at the base, on a brilliant morning in mid-February. After twenty years! How good it looked to me! I walked the deck all that day with a choky feeling in my throat, and avoided people as the plague. How could they understand? The gorgeous shores of Cornwall unrolled, green and sunshot; then in the dusk of a thrilling day the Eddystone popped up on the sea-line, the lights of Plymouth blinked beyond.

The anchor crashed down, and I handed out tips regardless of economics, heedless of to-morrow.

Let to-morrow take care of itself. I was Home!





## AIDE-de-CAMP'S LIBRARY

---

*Accn. No.*.....

1. Books may be retained for a period not exceeding fifteen days.